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# A Step into The Past

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Book 07

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Huang Yi

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## Chapter 1

### So near and yet so far

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As everyone in the hall waited expectantly, Ji Yanran flitted in and accompanying her is the current expert of astronomy, his old friend Zou Yan.

Ji Yanran has lost some weight but it has not affected her beauty at all. Besides, her freshness and purity is something that no one can win against.

Zhao Ya and Zhao Zhi are all outstanding beauties but when compared to her, they immediately paled in comparison.

There's a little more sadness in Ji Yanran's pretty eyes, and who knows if it may be because she misses him.

Zou Yan on the other hand looks energetic as he accompanied Ji Yanran into the main hall.

Xiang Shaolong was afraid that Ji Yanran would recognize his build so he hurriedly hid behind Zhao Ba and Zhao Zhi.

Zhao Mu who was dumbfounded on seeing her finally regained his senses and stepped forward, saying loudly, "Welcome, Learned Lady Ji and Mister Zou, for coming."

Everyone can't help but lean nearer towards the entrance, to take a look at

this beauty famed for her looks and intellect.

Xiang Shaolong was instead pushed out of the way.

Zhao Zhi's voice rang next to his ear, "Mister Dong!"

At this time Zhao Mu was introducing Ji Yanran and Zou Yan to the guests one by one and Xiang Shaolong was startled as he turned around to look at Zhao Zhi who was behind him. He saw that her pretty eyes were gleaming as she stared deeply at him so he hurriedly smiled and asked, "Miss Zhao has something to say?"

Zhao Zhi replied gently, "Mister looks really like someone I know!" Xiang Shaolong was relieved and knows that Jing Jun has only leaked a little news, he did not reveal everything at all so he pretended to look interested and asked, "Would that be Miss Zhao's lover?"

His words are obviously teasing as he knows that Zhao Zhi will definitely not be able to take it and he'll thank his lucky stars if she will henceforth ignore him. However, Zhao Zhi's pretty face blushed instead as she lowered her head with shyness. She suddenly shook her head and walked away.

Ji Yanran's laughter could be heard tinkling from the crowd over there. However Xiang Shaolong is breaking out in cold sweat. What is this all about? Isn't Zhao Zhi in love with Jing Jun? Then why does she look as if she has feelings for him, and wouldn't that make him Jing Jun's rival in love? If she doesn't like Jing Jun, why is she returning his letters?

Just as he was feeling numb, it was now Zhao Ya's turn to look for him.

Zhao Ya had an obviously jealous expression yet she pretended to be nonchalant and said, "Everyone is in a hurry to get to know Ji Yanran but why is Mister hiding here?"

Xiang Shaolong's hatred towards her was still strong so he deliberately made fun of her, going near her ear and whispering in a coarse voice, "I am naturally astoundingly attractive to women, if I let Ji Yanran get close to me, she will definitely not be able to retrain her feelings so it's better that I stay away."

Zhao Ya was stunned on hearing it. To think that there is such a thick-skinned man in the world who will boast of his charm towards women, especially when the recipient of his speech is a woman like her, isn't he insinuating that she is also offering herself because she could not resist his lure?

She almost wanted to leave in anger but her pretty legs won't listen to her, insisting on staying put. Even though he insulted her, she seems to feel a masochistic joy in it.

Looking at how uncertain and sad her pretty face looked, Xiang Shaolong felt a sense of accomplishment and added on, "I'm even more afraid of bedding women, because once those women had a taste of my prowess and the joy, I guarantee that they will not be able to leave me. Hai! That would really be a headache."

Zhao Ya was absolutely flabbergasted. There's not a single person whom she

has just met would dare to say such shameless and dirty words to her. But of all things this person has said something, which she felt, is so moving to the core ever since she met Xiang Shaolong.

She was absolutely confused and unconsciously said, "But all men wants to get Learned Lady Ji's heart and body, why is Mister the only exception?"

Xiang Shaolong found it very interesting to make fun of her and replied with a smile, "People say that talent can arouse jealousy, I think that this sounds very reasonable. If I manage to get Learned Lady Ji and she in turn refuses to let go of me, we'll certainly incur the jealousy of others. Won't it bring unnecessary trouble that will be disadvantageous to my grand plan of setting up the family business here. That's why I can only suppress my lust. Hai! To tell you the truth, back in Chu, I must have a woman with me every night!"

Zhao Ya blushed on hearing that but at the same time felt a ridiculous sense of wild excitement. She lowered her head and said, "Has Mister always been so direct in your talks with women whom you've just met?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly finding this funny as he replied, "I've always spoken from my heart towards women. You can excuse yourself if you don't like to listen, I've always been like that."

Zhao Ya's sense of self-respect could not tolerate this any further and she replied angrily, "Mister does not respect how a girl feels at all, who would be able to tolerate such talk."

Xiang Shaolong saw that the attention of everyone else were all centered on

Ji Yanran and no one took notice of them at all so he chortled, “Women are like horses, once you know of their likings, you can tame them into obedient creatures. Hei! Horses that I have taken a liking to, every single one of them will ultimately surrender to my whip.”

These words are even more obvious. Zhao Ya could not take it any longer and replied angrily, “Mister is too overbearing towards women, treating humans as beasts and taming them, don’t you care about other’s feelings at all?” But in her heart she was confused, unable to determine what kind of a person is this horse fanatic. At one moment he seems to be a gentleman who does not chase after women, the next moment he’s suddenly like a sex maniac.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that he’s made her suffered enough and said nonchalantly, “To me, horses have better morality than humans. Once they have regarded someone as master, they will not keep changing their minds.”

Zhao Ya was stunned, for these words seemed to have stirred the pain in her heart.

Xiang Shaolong realized that Zhao Zhi was peeping at him talking to Zhao Ya from amongst the crowd so he winked at her mischievously, making her so furious that she hurriedly turned her head away.

Zhao Ya noticed it and she asked with furrowed brows, “What has Mister spoken to Zhao Zhi about?”

Xiang Shaolong was thinking that it was none of her business, since he did not even ask her what did she and Marquis Pingshan spoke about. He went

near her ears and said, “She is a wild horse, and Lady is another horse.”

This time Zhao Ya has finally reached the end of her patience and she suddenly looked livid and was about to reprimand him when Zhao Mu’s voice could be heard saying, “Mister Dong Kuang has gone over that side, Miss Ji would like to get to know tonight’s star!”

Everyone turned around to look towards the two of them.

Xiang Shaolong cast a meaningful eye at Zhao Ya before leaving with a smile, secretly feeling smug that he has finally vented his anger. It’s best that from now on Zhao Ya will lose her interest in him, which would save him a lot of unnecessary trouble.

Hai!

If she could just cultivate herself by staying at home and repent, maybe he’ll be softhearted and forgive her, but now it’s a totally different matter. He finally managed to squeeze past the crowd to reach Zhao Mu’s side.

Ji Yanran’s pretty eyes landed on him and a strange gleam suddenly darted past but when she noticed that it’s not Xiang Shaolong, her eyes dimmed again. The changes in her expression were obvious.

Xiang Shaolong forced the feelings of excitement and heat down as he paid his respects, “Dong Kuang pays his respect to Miss Ji and Mister Zou.”

Ji Yanran regained her senses and returned his bow with a smile, “I’ve long



heard of Mister's name. Yanran is also a horse lover, I must seek Mister's advice if the opportunity arises."

Xiang Shaolong feels the regrettable feeling of her being so near and yet so far! He secretly thought that if he doesn't make use of this rare opportunity to secretly make her understand, he'll need to spend a lot more trouble in future. If she could not find him, or received news that he has gone to Qin and thus make her way there, they would have missed the chance to meet.

He immediately nodded his head and replied, "How can I live up to Miss's praise. I've heard of Miss Ji's excellent horse named Jifeng, and wonder if you can me see it and it would be an eye opener for me."

Ji Yanran and Zou Yan were equally startled.

Ji Yanran was immediately energized as her pretty eyes stared at him unwaveringly as she said, "If Mister is free, why don't you come over to my place tomorrow morning and I can learn from your expertise."

Everyone around them threw looks of envy at Xiang Shaolong. They did not expect that this person would be able to have the chance to interact with this rare beauty in close proximity because of his skills in rearing horses.

Lord Longyang's dainty voice interrupted, "A few of my horses seemed to have fallen ill, can Mister Dong come and take a look as well."

This sentence caused him to receive another kind of envious looks.

Xiang Shaolong was thinking this is a headache and secretly lamenting but he replied with perfunctory, “Your highness have traveled a long way here, the horses are just tired! They’ll be fine after resting for a while.”

Once he said that, every is clear that Xiang Shaolong has no interest in men at all.

Lord Longyang whined, “My horses and I have rested for more than a month, besides they only fell ill recently. Aren’t you a horse lover? How can you just watch them die?”

Zhao Mu was afraid that he’ll offend Lord Longyang so he moved the conversation along by saying, “Mister Dong is not like that at all. I’ll find some time tomorrow to accompany Mister Dong to pay a visit to Lord Longyang.”

He then said to Ji Yanran, “I would like to see this marvelous steed that can make Mister Dong pine over it as well.”

Xiang Shaolong and Ji Yanran secretly cursed but there’s nothing they can do to him.

The latter said with resign, “Yanran will of course welcome you, your Highness. Please come with Mister Dong!”

Zhao Ya’s feelings are entirely different.

Never in her dreams would she expect Ji Yanran to proactively invite this nonsensical weirdo. Could it be that he really has the natural attraction

towards women? Indeed she herself has been caught in a flutter, not knowing whether she should like him or hate him.

Zhao Mu said, "The feast should begin, Miss Ji please be seated."

Ji Yanran can't help but cast a meaningful look towards Zou Yan.

How can that wily old fox Zou Yan not understand so he said with a smile, "Since Yanran and Mister Dong are both horse lovers and this is such a rare chance today, why don't I exchange seats with Mister Dong."

This time even Zhao Mu's jealousy was aroused but everyone knows that Ji Yanran have always taken interest in weird and rare people which has nothing to do with romantic feelings at all so no one would think that these 2 would have any secret relationship at all.

Xiang Shaolong suppressed the excitement he felt and replied happily, "This is more than what I can ask for. I'm just afraid that I am too ill-learned and Miss Ji would be offended."

Ji Yanran gave a sweet smile which stunned everyone before saying gently, "It is I who should feel favored." She dare not look at Xiang Shaolong any longer and turned to follow Zhao Mu's attendant towards a table on the left. The aqua and white colored gown together with the jet black and shiny hairstyle attracted the gaze of everyone.

Zhao Ya wished that she could give Xiang Shaolong a few stabs. He just said that he will not go near Ji Yanran and yet now he's showing off that he could

be next to her. Suddenly, she was startled to realize that she has successfully forgotten about Xiang Shaolong. In her heart now there is only this hateful, yet lovable, unfathomable wild man.

After Xiang Shaolong was seated, he realized that it's still difficult to talk. Firstly the 2 of them were about 5 feet apart but also because pretty maids were behind both of them trying to serve them so no matter how much they have to say to each other, there is no chance to.

Sitting opposite them were Zhao Mu and Zhao Ya, the latter deliberately trying not to look at Xiang Shaolong and the atmosphere was embarrassing.

Zhao Mu thought that Zhao Ya was unhappy that he forced her to be close to Xiang Shaolong, that's why she was furious and did not think much of it.

The few hundred tables were fully seated and the atmosphere was lively.

Zou Yan was seated together with Guo Kai and they were laughing and talking.

After Ji Yanran was seated, she felt that she has no opportunity to speak with Xiang Shaolong at all because she is the star of the feast and everyone is trying to show themselves off in front of her and she had to entertain all of them.

2 pairs of eyes constantly flitted to where Xiang Shaolong was. One pair belonged to Lord Longyang who was seated on the table next to the main table, and the other belonged to Zhao Zhi, who was seated together with

Zhao Ba at the table 5 tables down, opposite from Zhao Mu.

The Marquis of Pingshan, Han Chuang, who held no regard for Xiang Shaolong initially, was now staring at him with hatred when he saw that he actually had the honor of sitting together with Ji Yanran.

At this time someone asked Ji Yanran, "I wonder what is the thing that can move Miss Ji's heart in this world?"

Everyone felt this to be very interesting so they all looked steadily at Ji Yanran, waiting to see how she'll respond.

Ji Yanran's pretty eyes turned around as she replied with a smile, "This is a very difficult question to answer! There will be different answers at the different stages of life. Maybe when Yanran's beauty is gone, the thing that I would want most is my youth, which will never come back!"

Everyone knows she's deliberately avoiding the question and they all expressed their displeasure, forcing her to give an answer.

How can Xiang Shaolong bear to let his love be bullied so he chortled and said, "Miss Ji has already answered this question. Something that is unobtainable will always be pined for."

Everyone became quiet and as they mulled over it, felt that the reply was reasonable.

For example, everyone would like to become the ruler of a country, and

precisely because they know that there's no way they can get it, it becomes more of a lure for them.

Guo Zhong said with admiration, "I did not expect that Mister Dong would have other skills besides the art of rearing horses." Everyone laughed.

Lord Longyang said coquettishly, "I wonder what thing will attract Mister Dong?" The Marquis of Pingshan interrupted, "Of course it's that treasured horse which he'll never get that can travel a thousand miles in a day!"

Immediately laughter roared in the hall and the atmosphere was lively.

Xiang Shaolong knows that now is a good opportunity for him to portray himself in an unrefined yet open image in front of these administrators of Zhao so he said loudly, "Not at all! Not at all! Just having one or two rare horses is of no help at all to the overall situation, what I want is 10,000 warhorses that can give my King victory."

All the Zhaos seated nodded their head in agreement.

Zhao Ya can't help but ask, "But what is the impossible thing that can make Mister Dong pine for it?"

Xiang Shaolong laughed roughly and continued talking in his trademark hoarse voice, staring at Zhao Ya as he replied, "I've always lacked imagination, and I will never waste my effort thinking about things that I know for sure that I cannot get. But! Hei! Some things that can be obtained and yet still out of reach can make my heart itch so much that I have

sleepless nights.”

All the men there understood the underlying meaning and smiled.

Zhao Ya saw that he was staring at her as he spoke and felt both anger and joy. She lowered her head and avoided his gaze.

Ji Yanran who was next to him thought about the thing that she could almost have as well and her pretty face blushed unconsciously. She secretly took a look at him, wishing that she can throw herself immediately into his arms.

At this time an attendant suddenly walked in towards Zhao Mu and quietly reported something to him. Zhao Mu revealed a look of surprise and looked at Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong was just feeling puzzled when Zhao Mu stood up and announced, “Tonight we have another esteemed just who has just arrived and he is the most popular guest of Chu’s Lord Chunshen, Mister Li Yuan.”

Once Xiang Shaolong heard that, he was startled and cold sweat broke out.

## Chapter 2

### Guest from afar

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Under everyone's gaze, Li Yuan, who was dressed in grand robes and looks about 25 or 26 years old, stepped into the hall suavely under the accompaniment of Zhao Mu's attendant.

Undeniably he is a very good looking man, fresh but with character. He has broad shoulders, slender waist, long legs, standing straight and tall with a long sword hanging from his waist, giving one the impression that he's well versed in both scholarly pursuits and martial arts.

His eyes were alert and lively; obviously this is an intelligent person and not someone to be belittled.

Xiang Shaolong's heart started pounding.

He has so many things to worry about that he's not even sure himself.

The worst thing is that he may be able to tell from just one look that he is not the horse fanatic Dong Kuang, by then he can forget about leaving the Marquis residence alive.

Secondly is his relationship with Zhao Mu. If Li Yuan is the person sent by Chu's Lord Chunshen to secretly liaise with Zhao Mu, then Zhao Mu will immediately realize the trap that Xiang Shaolong has set for him.



Besides, if Li Yuan knows that the Chu envoy still has not reached Handan, he'll definitely guess that something happened along the way and this will arouse his and Zhao Mu's suspicion.

Any one of these problems is enough to make their whole group perish.

Hai! How did someone like this end up appearing out of nowhere?

Li Yuan stepped into the hall, listening as Zhao Mu spoke to him and at the same time suavely acknowledging the guests seated on both sides with a slight smile.

Xiang Shaolong wished that Li Yuan would never finish his walk.

Ji Yanran is was alert and had long noticed that his expression seemed strange so she said with a smile, "Mister Dong! The State of Chu is really filled with talents. Not only has it produced a horse expert like you, there's also the extraordinary Mister Li Yuan who is famed for his intellect and swordsmanship. His younger sister Li Yanyan is the latest beloved concubine of the King of Chu and I heard that she's now pregnant. If she can bear a son, he will become the Crown Prince of Chu, so now everyone thinks that his future is limitless."

Xiang Shaolong understood that it's because of the maids behind hindering them, she deliberately used such a method to drop hints on Li Yuan's background. She went to Chu before arriving in Handan, so naturally she knows about the latest news from Chu.

But he felt that when she mentioned Li Yuan's name, her expression looked a little unnatural.

When Li Yuan saw Ji Yanran, his eyes immediately brightened and he came to their table and politely greeting Xiang Shaolong, "How do you do, Mister Dong! We may both be from Chu, but I did not expect that we only have the chance to meet here in Handan, which is a thousand miles away."

Xiang Shaolong was slightly relieved that the most urgent problem is solved so he rose and returned the greeting.

Zhao Mu suddenly made a strange look at him, then looked at Li Yuan with a flash of murderous intent in his eyes.

Li Yuan was not too concerned about Xiang Shaolong as his gaze turned towards Ji Yanran, immediately filled with a captivating light as he said, "Miss Ji left without a word, giving me much grief."

He lowered his voice so that other than Zhao Mu and Xiang Shaolong, other guests still thought that he was making polite talk.

Another load was off Xiang Shaolong's mind as he realized that this Li Yuan is actually harassing Ji Yanran and it seems that they were once together in Chu, otherwise Li Yuan would not have spoken with such jealousy. It seems that this Li Yuan is a born romantic, otherwise why would he run after her through mountains and lakes all the way from Chu. Once he thought of this, he feels troubled again. Ever since Zhao Ya betrayed him, he no longer has the blind faith he used to have towards women. This Li Yuan is an

outstanding person and so passionate about love, how would he know if he would be able to snatch Ji Yanran away from his hands. If this really turns out to be the case, the blow to him will be even harder than the one Zhao Ya gave him.

After Ji Yanran stole a peek at Xiang Shaolong, she replied with a smile, “Mister Li, you’re too harsh with your words, how can Yanran bear it.”

Zhao Mu said with a smile, “So you two are old acquaintances, now that everyone is in Handan, why worry that there’ll be no time to catch up. Why don’t Mister Li join my table and enjoy the performances by the song and dance courtesans.”

Li Yuan smiled suavely and after giving Ji Yanran a meaningful look, followed Zhao Mu and seated himself between Zhao Mu and Zhao Ya.

Ji Yanran seems to have been moved that Li Yuan ran after her all the way to Handan. She lowered her pretty face, her eyes looking lost.

Xiang Shaolong started feeling even more uncomfortable.

The music started, a group of over a hundred song and dance courtesans came to the middle of the hall and started singing and dancing with their colorful outfit flitting in the air, giving both auditory and sensory entertainment.

“Hey!”

Xiang Shaolong was slightly startled, only to see Ji Yanran looking at him deeply with the corner of her eyes, filled with her love and longing.

At this time the dancers have blocked the view from the direction of Li Yuan, Zhao Mu and Zhao Ya and everyone else were concentrating on enjoying the performance. The music also helped to cover their conversation so that others can't hear them. It is indeed a good opportunity to talk secrets.

Xiang Shaolong revealed a slightly unnatural smile.

Ji Yanran rolled her eyes at him and said, "Can you not show me such a lack of confidence? You don't know how much I've been missing you!"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly thinking that this is called 'once bitten, twice shy'. He asked quietly, "Where are you staying?"

Ji Yanran quickly told him and added, "Don't look for me, let me look for you. Lord Longyang has always suspected that there's something going on between us so there's still people watching me even here."

Xiang Shaolong knows that she is smart beyond others and has excellent ways of accomplishing things so he's not worried that she will slip up. He nodded his head in agreement.

Ji Yanran suddenly stopped talking and recollected herself.

Xiang Shaolong was alert and immediately pretended to be totally engrossed with the performance.

It turned out that the dancers have now gathered to the middle of the hall into a small circle inside a larger circle, curving and flexing their bodies into various attractive poses, so the line of sight between Xiang Shaolong and Zhao Mu is now unblocked.

Zhao Ya is obviously quite interested in Li Yuan, constantly trying to make him talk. Xiang Shaolong was secretly livid on seeing it but even he does not know why he still has such feelings of jealousy towards her.

Li Yuan conversed with her politely but most of the time he was looking at Ji Yanran.

The Marquis of Pingshan, Han Chuang is obviously interested in Ji Yanran as well, looking at her intensely from time to time, as if he wants to eat her up.

All of those who had thought of wooing this world famous Learned Lady felt inept once they saw the appearance of Li Yuan and gave up the idea of wooing her. Besides, Ji Yanran seems a little interested in him as well. If not for Li Yuan's unique status and his extremely excellent swordsmanship, maybe someone would have wanted to kill him long ago.

Right until the end of the feast, the two of them could not find another opportunity to speak.

Ji Yanran left first with Zou Yan and was resolute in her rejection of Li Yuan's offer to accompany her. Of course she's making use of this to illustrate her stand towards Xiang Shaolong, which makes Xiang Shaolong and others who are interested in her extremely happy.

After Li Yuan left dejectedly, Xiang Shaolong was thinking of slipping off but was dragged by Zhao Mu to accompany him on sending off the guests at the main door.

Before Guo Zhong left, he reminded him about the feast at his house the next night.

When it came to Zhao Ba and Zhao Zhi's turn, the latter took a deep look at him before leaving with Zhao Ba whereas Lord Longyang's flirtatious look as he left gave him goose pimples.

In the end only Zhao Mu, Zhao Ya, Guo Kai, Le Cheng, Han Chuang and Xiang Shaolong were left.

It seems that Han Chuang is waiting for Zhao Ya and Xiang Shaolong can't help but feel furious, deliberately choosing to ignore Zhao Ya whose pretty eyes kept flitting over to him.

Han Chuang told Zhao Mu excitedly, "Besides the State of Yan, everyone else is here."

Although what he said seems to be without any head or tail, Xiang Shaolong knows clearly what he meant and also knows that he has mistaken Li Yuan to be the representative from Chu who has come to discuss how to attack Qin in the meeting held by Lord Dongzhou.

The situation is actually very interesting.

Amongst the 6 states, the ones who place the most importance in joining forces are naturally the states of Han, Zhao and Wei who are at the forefront of strong Qin.

Qi is also very anxious over the plan to join forces against Qin, because if the 3 states fall, the next target would undeniably be Qi, before the Chus.

Now that Han Chuang thinks that even Chu has sent an envoy over, of course he'll be ecstatic over it.

As for Yan, it is still recovering from the attacks launched by Lian Bo of Zhao, and their position has fallen greatly in the eyes of the other states so it doesn't matter if they come or not.

Zhao Mu gave a cold snort, "I'm afraid Li Yuan's trip here has got nothing to do with the secret meeting."

Han Chuang laughed, "He is now the most popular person with the King of Chu and I heard that his sister's beauty can take down a country. The King of Chu has no son yet so if she manages to give birth to a Crown Prince, Li Yuan will become the uncle of the future King. Therefore if he can help put in a few good words, do we need to worry that the King of Chu won't take part in the grand scheme this time?"

An icy cold look flashed past Zhao Mu's eyes again, even the scar on his face looks a lot deeper.

Xiang Shaolong could see everything clearly as a bystander and knows that

Zhao Mu is filled with unhappiness and hatred towards Li Yuan.

Guo Kai said with a smile, "Is Lady tired? Let Marquis Pingshan send you back!"

Han Chuang said to Zhao Ya politely, "I wonder if I can have the honor?"

Guo Kai and Le Cheng both understood his meaning and smiled. Han Chuang's question is akin to asking Zhao Ya if he could have the pleasure of her company again tonight.

Zhao Ya seemed a little embarrassed and looked towards Xiang Shaolong.

Whereas Xiang Shaolong looked towards the square outside the door, where 4 horse carriages and numerous Zhao soldiers were respectfully waiting.

Zhao Mu remembered that he had promised Xiang Shaolong to help him with Zhao Ya and even if tonight is not the night, but if he allows Han Chuang to 'take away' Zhao Ya in front of him today, it'll be a loss of face as well. So he said, "Marquis Pingshan please return early to rest, I have to enter the Palace with Lady later to meet his Majesty."

Han Chuang has no choice but to leave.

Zhao Mu told Guo Kai and Le Cheng, "I still have some things to discuss with Mister Dong, both of you can leave first!"

Guo Kai made an eye at Xiang Shaolong behind Zhao Mu's back, asking him



to be careful before leaving with Le Cheng, laughing and chatting as they walked.

Only Zhao Mu, Zhao Ya and Xiang Shaolong was left and the atmosphere was a little awkward.

Zhao Mu told Zhao Ya, "After I finish a few words with Mister Dong, he'll accompany you back to your residence!"

Zhao Ya's pretty face changed as she pouted, "Don't I know how to go back on my own?" After which she stared angrily at Zhao Mu and Xiang Shaolong before she stepped out of the door, into her carriage and left, leaving behind Zhao Mu and Xiang Shaolong looking at each other, both suffering a great loss of face.

Zhao Mu smiled wryly, "Some women are like a wild horse that can never be tamed, very difficult to ride on."

Xiang Shaolong agreed, "Only such women are challenging enough."

Zhao Mu pulled him away and they walked along the corridor that's leading towards the inner residence. Although it's now deep into the night and very quiet, the Marquis residence is still brightly lit, and looks as if it's still day.

They only sat down when they reached the inner hall where Zhao Mu had shared with him the Yue beauties, the sisters Tian Zhen and Tian Feng, in the past.

After the maids served them tea, they retreated.

Zhao Mu seemed troubled and said after a moment of silence, “You should know the relation between my father and Li Yuan, right!”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting that he is now impersonating as Lord Chunshen’s trusted aide, who is here to help Zhao Mu dream about being King so of course he can’t say that he has no idea. But the only thing he knows is that Li Yuan’s sister is called Li Yanyan, and he could only remember her name because the two words in her name is the same as Ji Yanran, otherwise he would have forgotten even her name as well.

He went on bravely, “Is Marquis referring to Lady Yanyan’s matter? I have always been doing work for his Highness, so I have never met Li Yuan. All these were told by his Highness personally.”

Unexpectedly Zhao Mu actually nodded his head and sighed, “It’s exactly this matter. Don’t think that Li Yuan looks good and nice, but his level of manipulation, even all the thousand odd men and guests under my father’s residence cannot hold a candle to him. And don’t think that he only came here because he was chasing after Learned Lady Ji and have the mistaken impression that he is a hopeless romantic. I’m sure there is a reason behind this. No one else is more manipulative or ambitious than him. Humph! Seems that Father did not reveal to him the secret about me, luckily so!”

Xiang Shaolong knows that the danger is not over and if he lets Zhao Mu ask him a few more questions, his identity will immediately be revealed. So taking the hint from what was said, he added, “I really have no idea why his

Highness would trust Li Yuan so much?”

Naturally these words would not let any cat out of the bag.

Zhao Mu gave a cold snort, “Father is what you’ll call ‘an intelligent man will ultimately make a mistake due to too many responsibilities’, and the bottom line is all about women. That’s right! You just came from Chu, did Li Yanyan give birth to a boy or girl?”

Xiang Shaolong now has some vague understanding but is unable to describe the whole thing so he can only say, “I only heard she was about to give birth.”

A dangerous cloud loomed over Zhao Mu’s face as he said angrily, “I did not expect Li Yuan to actually use the same devious trick as Lu Buwei. Father refused to believe my words. If Li Yuan gains power in future, how could he possibly agree to let Father control court affairs. This time Father is really letting the wolf into the house.”

If Xiang Shaolong still does not understand, then he’s better off staying at home. Zhao Mu talked about women hindering matters, and said that Li Yuan is copying Lu Buwei’s plan and Lord Chunshen letting the wolf in. With these clues, he can make an accurate guess as to what is happening. He hurriedly sighed as well and said, “And who knows if this Li Yanyan is really Li Yuan’s sister.”

Zhao Mu replied, “That seems to be the truth. Besides when Father was on close terms with Li Yanyan, Li Yuan has no chance to meet Li Yanyan at all

and Father had sent people to check on their relationship as siblings as well.” He looked at him suspiciously and added, “You should be knowing all these!”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly cursing, so it turns out that the child in Li Yanyan’s stomach does not belong to Li Yuan, but to Lord Chunshen. Da.mn! How could he have known that the situation is so full of twists.

He replied calmly, “How could I not know. It’s just that the person in charge of the investigation is called He Quan, and this person is only good at bootlicking. He’s quite slipshod when it comes to other matters so I was afraid that he’ll be tricked by Li Yuan.”

All these are just nonsense he made up, but the aim is to gain Zhao Mu’s trust. There’s even the name of a person, so Zhao Mu would certainly believe him.

This evil fiend was indeed taken in and said sternly, “That is not where the problem lies. There should be no doubt that they are siblings. I didn’t expect Father to be so careless.”

This time Xiang Shaolong is really enlightened and have figured out the relationship between Li Yuan, his sister and Lord Chunshen.

This Li Yuan is really formidable. He first offered his sister to Lord Chunshen and after she became pregnant, let Lord Chunshen gave this beauty who is pregnant with his child to the King of Chu who is without a son. Then the child that will be born will have a bigger chance of becoming the Crown Prince. They are re-enacting the plan of Lu Buwei giving Zhu Ji to King

Zhuangxiang.

After he got this clear, Xiang Shaolong was relieved and said, “Now that Li Yuan has offered himself here, this is a great chance to get rid of him. By then Li Yanyan won’t be able to escape from his Highness’s clutches.”

Zhao Mu said seriously, “This can never be done, otherwise it will create an avalanche of problems and even I will not be able to extricate myself. Besides his swordsmanship is excellent and extremely cunning. The family warriors accompanying him this time are all highly skilled. If something goes wrong and your man gets captured by him, even I will not be able to save you.”

Xiang Shaolong smiled icily, “Do not worry, I will wait until he leaves the border of Zhao before I strike.”

Zhao Mu saw how much effort he is making and clasped his shoulder joyfully, saying with a frosty smile, “One need not necessarily use swords to kill, let me mull over this matter. That’s right! Do you really understand the nature of horses, otherwise you may reveal your shortcomings tomorrow in front of Learned Lady Ji. Hai! This is the first time I’ve met such a beauty, a pity...”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “Marquis please do not worry, how can I pretend to be a horse fanatic if I know nothing about horses?”

Zhao Mu replied, “I’m afraid Zhao Ya is not possible tonight, why don’t I send you a few other beauties!”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “Forget about it for tonight, we still have to go to

Learned Lady Ji's place early tomorrow morning. Are we going separately?"

Once Zhao Mu remembered that he can see Ji Yanran again tomorrow, he was immediately energized and said, "I'll pick you up to go together." He added with gratitude, "All thanks to you for today."

Xiang Shaolong knows that he was referring to the female assassin and after saying a few humble words, bid his farewell.

Zhao Mu sent him right to the main door and only turned back into his residence when he saw him going up the carriage and riding out under the accompaniment of his family warriors.

## **Chap 3**

### **The Night is Painfully Short**

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The horse carriage trotted past the quiet streets of Handan, illuminated by the lanterns in the dark night.

As the carriage bumped around, Xiang Shaolong's thoughts were bumpy as well.

Right until this point in time, he has yet to think of any good way to capture Zhao Mu alive and cut down Le Cheng's head before escaping from Handan safely.

There was just an assassination attempt on Zhao Mu tonight so he'll definitely be extra careful in future and security will definitely be tightened. Under such circumstances, it won't be easy to kill him, much less capture him alive.

Now that the envoys from the 6 states are arriving one by one, the Zhaos, in order to keep this a secret and to prevent Qin spies from infiltrating the city, have now stepped up the defenses of the city by ten, or even a hundred times. Even sending someone to slip out of the city is a dangerous mission because they are now keeping detailed records of the people coming to and from the city.

Besides, his time here is limited. If the Zhaos realize that his promise of a

large batch of warhorses arriving in Handan is not materializing, his situation would be far from optimistic.

Luckily a few hundred warhorses will be arriving in a few days' time and hopefully that will ease some of the wait for the Zhaos.

Being with Zhao Mu is an extremely dangerous affair; just one word spoken wrongly and he can be defeated or humiliated.

As for his personal relationships, everything is in a bigger mess.

Firstly no one can guarantee that Ji Yanran's heart will remain unchanged. With the lesson from Zhao Ya, his confidence in himself with regards to such matters is no longer the same as before.

As for his entangled relationship with Zhao Ya, he is even more bothered about it. Sometimes he finds her pitiful but most of the time he finds her hateful.

Hai! Forget it!

Just forget about her.

She is indeed a flirtatious woman, falling for every person she sees.

If that Li Yuan were to hook his finger at her, she would throw herself into his arms too.



Once he thought about this, the fire of revenge burned in him again, making him even more confused.

Zhao Zhi has obviously seen through something. A person's heart is unfathomable and if she wants to betray them, their outcome will be tragic. To be able to die in battle would be a good ending, for what they fear most is to be captured alive, for that will be a fate worse than death.

He finally returned to his residence that used to be the Hostage Residence.

Xiang Shaolong left the carriage and walked into the house.

Teng Yi, Wu Zhuo and Jing Jun were all waiting for his return and followed him straight into the house with high walls, which was used to put the fake Ying Zheng in house arrest.

The 3 of them saw that he didn't look happy but none dared to ask any questions, only following him into the secret room then used for discussion.

After the 4 of them were seated, Xiang Shaolong turned his icy face towards Jing Jun and said, "Xiao Jun! What exactly have you revealed to Zhao Ya? Do not try to hide anything."

Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo's expressions both changed.

In this dangerous place where enemies are everywhere, they are like walking on thin ice, one wrong step and their lives would immediately be in danger, not to mention if their background has been leaked.

Jing Jun was startled and lowered his head, asking in fear, “Third Brother has seen Zhao Zhi?”

Xiang Shaolong did not reveal that Zhao Zhi did not expose him directly in case Jing Jun tried to deny anything, but just nodded his head.

Teng Yi banged the table and cursed, “You’re an ignorant fool who knows not the consequences. Do you want everyone to perish because of your stupidity. We have already warned you long ago.”

Jing Jun smiled wryly, “That warning came too late, I’ve already told her long ago that we will be returning in the near future.”

Wu Zhuo asked lividly, “Don’t you know that Zhao Zhi is a Zhao? If her love for her country is more than her love for you, what would be the consequences.”

Jing Jun replied dejectedly, “She doesn’t love me at all, she only loves Third Brother.”

All three were stunned.

Teng Yi furrowed his brows, “Don’t sprout nonsense in order to wriggle yourself out of this.”

Jing Jun said miserably, “She only regards me as a mischievous little brother. She’s willing to talk to me only because she wants to know more about Third Brother.”

Xiang Shaolong asked, "What did she write in her last letter to you?"

Jing Jun replied haltingly in shame, "She asked when we'll be coming to Handan and if we to be received. Ai! It's not that I have not thought of the problem that she's a Zhao, it's just that she told me she has a deep enmity with Zhao Mu, that's why I believe she will not betray us."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned. On the surface Zhao Zhi and Zhao Mu seemed to interact harmoniously, even training his courtesans for him. He can't tell anything out of the ordinary at all.

Why would she have a deep enmity?

Wu Zhuo asked, "What enmity does she has with Zhao Mu?"

Jing Jun shook his head, at a loss, "She refused to tell."

Teng Yi hesitated, "Maybe it has something to do with a woman's chastity."

Wu Zhuo asked, "Who else is there in Zhao Zhi's family?"

Xiang Shaolong and Wu Zhuo both revealed a look of attentiveness. This question is the key to everything. If Zhao Zhi has a large family in Zhao, why would she sacrifice her whole clan because of a man. At least she cannot leave behind her birth father. But if she wants her father to leave together with her, she will never get his approval.

Jing Jun replied, "She seems to live with only her Father, I... I don't know

anything at all.”

Teng Yi was flabbergasted and sighed, “You’re really messing things up.” Jing Jun joined because of him, so it makes him feel he needs to be responsible for everything that Jing Jun does.

Wu Zhuo asked, “Didn’t you send her a reply? What did you write in the letter?”

Amongst all three, Wu Zhuo is the calmest now and all his questions are pin pointed on the most crucial aspects.

Jing Jun is after all still a child so he sobbed out his reply, “I told her we will appear in Handan in disguise, and will find a chance to make contact with her after we arrive.”

Xiang Shaolong can’t bear to see him thus so he patted his shoulder in consolation, “The situation is not that bad. Although she seems to have recognized me, firstly she’s still not too sure, and secondly she did not call my bluff. There’s still a chance to turn the situation around. But I really do not understand, since you know that she only regards you as a younger brother, why do you still want to become entangled with her?”

Jing Jun choked, “I don’t understand too. But if she becomes your woman, Xiao Jun would never have an ounce of unhappiness.”

Teng Yi said calmly, “We must not let our fate be under the control of a woman’s hand. Xiao Jun, show me the way, I will kill her personally to

prevent any unforeseen problems.”

Jing Jun’s body trembled violently, his eyes wide opened in shock.

Wu Zhuo nodded his head, “This seems like the only solution.”

Among the four, two has already agreed to silence her. Jing Jun was so startled that he forgot to cry but only looked pleadingly at Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong thought secretly to himself that if they want to keep this a secret, they’ll have to kill Tian Zhen as well and how can he bring himself to do it? He said calmly, “By doing this we will see the harm first before we see the benefits. Zhao Zhi spoke to me many times tonight and was taking special notice of me and others may have seen this happening. If she gets killed tonight immediately after seeing me once, someone will eventually pin it down to me.”

Wu Zhuo said icily, “Then the other way is to turn her into your woman, so we will be able to totally control her and at the same time check her background.”

Xiang Shaolong took a look at Jing Jun and saw that he was keeping silent with his head lowered and felt pity for him. He said with a sigh, “Xiao Jun is my good brother, how can I take his love away?”

Jing Jun said with gratitude, “With Third Brother’s such words, Xiao Jun can deeply feel the brotherly love we share. The truth is Third Brother has already let me enjoyed wealth and fame but I have yet the chance to repay

you. This time it is I who have made the mistake and almost implicated everyone.”

He suddenly knelt down and kowtowed to Xiang Shaolong, “Thried Brother please do whatever you have to towards Zhao Zhi, I will sincerely accede to anything.”

At this point all three knew that Jing Jun is truly in love with Zhao Zhi. In order to preserve her life, he’d rather give up his right. Seen from another point of view, it also means he’s automatically giving up in order to fulfill Zhao Zhi’s love towards Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong replied with a wry smile, “Although I have a liking for this beauty Zhao Zhi, I’ve never regarded it as a relationship between a man and woman, so it’s difficult for me to switch my mindset so quickly. Besides, it seems a little like I’m snatching my own good brother’s woman.”

Teng Yi said seriously, “Everyone knows that Shaolong is doing this for everyone’s safety so there’s no need for any doubt. If there’s a problem, we’ll have no choice but to be heartless for it’s better than sitting and waiting to be killed.”

Jing Jun exclaimed, “Third Brother! I’ll bring you there immediately!”

Xiang Shaolong felt a headache coming on and tried to delay by revealing, “I’ve made contact with Ji Yanran!”

Everyone was overjoyed and pressed for news.

Xiang Shaolong told them everything that has happened during the feast. The three of them furrowed their brows deeply on hearing it. Now that there is a sudden appearance of Li Yuan, it will only bring more hindrance than help to their mission and has made the situation even more complicated.

Just as they were feeling troubled, there was a knock on the door.

Wu Zhuo revealed a look of unhappiness. Who dares to interrupt them while they are in secret discussion. Jing Jun was about to open the door when the alert Teng Yi grabbed him, afraid that others will see his swollen eyes from crying and opened the door himself instead.

The leader of the elite troops Wu Guo said at the door, "A guest who refused to reveal his identity is here to look for Master and is now waiting in the hall."

He then described this person's dressing and looks.

Everyone thought that this person could be a girl in disguise after hearing the description and they looked at one another. Could it be that Zhao Zhi has found her way here.

Xiang Shaolong stood up and said, "I'll take a look!"

Xiang Shaolong stepped into the hall and on seeing the person dashed forward happily.

The beauty who was wrapped from head to toe in a huge robe ran forward

without a care into his arms, her dainty body trembling from excitement and joy.

It turns out to be the famous Learned Lady Ji Yanran.

As Xiang Shaolong felt the youthful, fiery and alluring body in his arms, all the worries and fears tonight were thrown immediately into the back of his mind.

He lifted her hood, letting her thick luscious hair fall down like waterfall as he uttered, "I didn't expect Yanran to come looking for me tonight, Xiang Shaolong is startled by such feelings."

Ji Yanran ignored the dumbfounded Wu Guo standing next to them and used all her might to hug his solid neck as she replied, "Yanran cannot wait a moment longer. Every day felt like an entire year during this half year as I suffered the pangs of missing you. If not for the fact that I could still talk about you with Mister Zou, I would not be able to tolerate it."

A beauty's generosity is immeasurable. Xiang Shaolong carried her up by her waist and told Wu Guo, "Let them know who has arrived!" and walked towards his bedroom.

Ji Yanran's pretty face immediately burned a fiery red right to her ears and although she buried her embarrassed face into his neck, the frantic beating of her heart could not hide the mix of shyness and happiness that she really felt.

But she did not make any show of objection, her dainty body so soft that



other than panting hard, she could say nothing else.

Although Xiang Shaolong is not a person who is usually in such urgent need for lust, firstly he really misses this pretty and loyal beauty a lot, not to mention that she's extremely alluring. Most importantly he now has the intention of striking while the iron is hot, to quickly possess this beauty's body first. This is to prevent any potential problems from arising, like giving the scheming Li Yuan the chance to take advantage or if he were to use some devious methods to snatch Yanran away.

He originally had a good impression of Li Yuan, but after finding out how he and Lord Chunshen made use of his sister Li Yanyan, his impression totally changed.

The distance from the hall back to the bedroom felt as long as a whole century.

The two of them were so nervous that none spoke a single word.

After they closed the room door, Xiang Shaolong sat with her on the bed, using his strong arms to surround her so that her alluring body is sticking close to him with no space in between at all.

Xiang Shaolong kissed her slender neck and tiny ears gently, even boldly nibbling at her tender earlobes.

Ji Yanran totally melted under his ministrations, her mouth giving out alluring and soul-catching moans as her beautiful body rubbed against him.

Xiang Shaolong proceeded to caress her fragrant lips. Ji Yanran could take this no more and her fair arms entangled themselves around him as she reacted passionately.

All the suffering that came with missing him has been redeemed at this instant with the most alluring sweetness.

At this point in time both of them totally forgot about themselves, their senses in disarray as they tangled passionately. Under Xiang Shaolong's teasing, Ji Yanran's flames of desire were fanned to a peak.

Xiang Shaolong was forceful and audacious, caressing every spot, exciting her so much that her dainty body trembled and her blood surged.

She can only hear her beloved saying gently in her ears, "Yanran! Xiang Shaolong is very grateful for your love, you're so good to me."

Ji Yanran responded with a whimper, which quickly turned into moans. This man's hand has already slipped into her clothes expertly, caressing at will the forbidden places that no one has ever invaded before.

Then the clothes on her body were slowly removed piece by piece.

Ji Yanran's lids were half closed, allowing Xiang Shaolong to do as he please. Sometimes she will unintentionally block him, but it was just a symbolic show of resistance and has no actual effect at all.

Under the light from the burning red candles, her fair, flawless and beautiful

body was finally revealed totally under the eyes and hands of Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong had to choose this time to nibble her earlobes and ask, “Will this be all right?”

Ji Yanran languidly opened her eyes that was filled with passion and rolled her eyes at him before nodding her head, her heart filled with willingness. She closed her eyes again. Such alluring attraction is enough to make Xiang Shaolong increase the activities on her dainty body.

After the gloriously naked body was lying flat on the bed, Xiang Shaolong stood up, admiring this beautiful body that all normal men in the world wants to possess and at the same time removing his own clothes.

Ji Yanran suddenly turned over on the bed, lifting her pretty face with much shyness as she peeked at him with lovelorn eyes and a slight smile.

Xiang Shaolong laughed, “Heaven is so unfair. Yanran has seen my body long ago, but I had to wait a painful 6 months before I have the chance to even the score.”

Ji Yanran pouted, “I only treated your injuries. The most embarrassing parts were all take care of wholly by your Princess Qian. It’s not like how you’re facing me right now at all!”

Xiang Shaolong revealed his perfectly muscular and alluring male body and said with a smile, “Has Learned Lady Ji finally regained her ability to talk?”

Ji Yanran objected, “You only know how to tease me.” She really wanted to turn her head around so that she won’t see this man embarrassing her but her eyes just won’t listen to her and they couldn’t move away from Xiang Shaolong’s masculine body and neither do they not want to see him.

Xiang Shaolong knelt next to the bed, lowered his head to look at her and at the same time his hands caressed her fair back and pert bottom, saying with a sigh, “Heavens! This work of Heaven is really a very moving piece.”

Ji Yanran moaned in response to his interesting and alluring words of love as she pouted, “Xiang Lang! I still have to go back before the day breaks!”

Xiang Shaolong replied with a laugh, “Then aren’t you going to turn yourself around?”

This time, Ji Yanran did not obey him submissively, instead she wished that she could burrow into the bed and hide herself.

Xiang Shaolong sat on the bed and gently flipped her over.

Ji Yanran’s eyes were tightly closed, her cheeks red. Her radiance was glaring, and extremely adorable.

Xiang Shaolong pressed down on her, their bodies touching without any gap in between at all and immediately this couple’s temperature was raised continuously.

In the warm bedroom, rolling around under the blankets, Ji Yanran’s virgin

passion was ignited and she welcomed and entwined herself around Xiang Shaolong without a care.

It was only now that Xiang Shaolong was totally assured of Ji Yanran's love as he got what everyone has admired and coveted, which is Ji Yanran's precious virginity.

After the tumultuous affair, Ji Yanran's limbs were still tightly entwined around his body, her eyes closed tight and pure bliss written all over her face.

Xiang Shaolong can feel how deeply in love this beauty is with him and how much she trusts him and he can't help but feel guilty that he had ever doubted her.

Xiang Shaolong pressed his face against hers and asked gently, "Happy?"

Ji Yanran hugged him with all her might, opened her pretty eyes which showed the satisfaction and sweetness after a tumultuous night as she sighed, "I did not expect that there will be such alluring experience between a man and a woman. Yanran feels as if my life before this has been lived in vain."

Such alluring words filled with so much love is more effective than any aphrodisiac and it immediately caused another storm.

At this point in time both of them were in perfect harmony, with no hindrance at all.

Xiang Shaolong can clearly feel his intense love for her, that's why he was nervous and troubled over Li Yuan's appearance.

Ji Yanran suddenly kissed him and asked, "Are you afraid that I have fallen for that Li Yuan?"

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head in embarrassment.

Ji Yanran replied tenderly, "You think too lowly of Yanran. I've seen countless handsome men but none other than you can make my heart beat faster. Xiang Shaolong can get Ji Yanran's heart, is not totally because he is more good looking than others, but because of his generosity, spirit, extraordinary intelligence and a heroic aura that is irresistible to others." She lowered her head and continued quietly, "And now there's the addition of the love and entanglement, the joy between a man and a woman."

Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to start round three with her but sadly the night is painfully short and with the urgent crows of the cockerel, he helped her with her robes and at the same time continued with his entanglements.

The big house that Ji Yanran is residing in is the residence of Handan's famous scholar Liu Huasheng, which is only 2 streets away from Xiang Shaolong's residence. Xiang Shaolong accompanied her back, choosing side streets and alleys to avoid the patrolling city guards.

Ji Yanran slipped back into the house from the back garden. Xiang Shaolong still wanted to kiss and caress her, and only released her after this beauty was suitably blushing. Only the both of them can experience the feelings of

entanglement between them.

As he walked back, Xiang Shaolong was filled with the intoxicating feeling of sweetness and warmth.

Suddenly, all the worries and danger became inconsequential matters.

## Chapter 4

### Love and Hatred

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With the strong will trained from the days in the Special Task Force, Xiang Shaolong forced himself up from bed and went to the hall to see Zhao Mu.

Zhao Mu's attitude was warm as he said, "Come! Let's have a good talk."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be dismayed, "Shouldn't we be heading to Learned Lady Ji's place immediately?"

Zhao Mu forced a smile, "This morning she sent to inform me that she's feeling a little unwell so the appointment to see the horse will have to be postponed. Hai! A woman's heart is most unfathomable, especially such a rare and haughty beauty."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing and thinking what could be so unfathomable? Ji Yanran was just following his instructions to cancel the appointment to avoid any embarrassment when they meet. It's just that he did not expect Zhao Mu to come and inform him personally.

After asking the servants to leave, Xiang Shaolong sat down next to him and asked, "Did Marquis have a good sleep last night?"

Zhao Mu sighed, "I almost even didn't close my eyes. Too many things happened during the feast and even when I told myself not to think about it,



my brain refuses to obey.” He continued in a quiet voice, “This time Li Yuan has brought with him a huge group of people. Those that can be considered experts are already more than 30 and they are all famous Chu swordsmen that he recently recruited to be his family warriors. Usually he keeps a very low profile in Chu in order to avoid raising Father’s suspicions but he’s revealing his true self once he arrived here.”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “Marquis, do not worry. I am confident that he will not able to return to our Great Chu alive.”

Zhao Mu was visibly touched as he looked at him and said, “Father has indeed chosen the right person to come. What is your real identity? Why have I never heard anyone mention you before.”

Xiang Shaolong already has a script long prepared so he replied calmly, “My real name is Wang Zhuo, a hunter from the Xiutu Tribe. His Highness came to hunt near where I lived once and met with a pack of wolves and I saved him. Ever since then his Highness has specially groomed me and allowed my clan to enjoy wealth and riches. He is my benefactor. His Highness wants me to help you accomplish the plan of becoming the King of Zhao, therefore he has never taken me back to the residence. My trip to Handan this time is to work together with Marquis and to act when there’s a chance. Won’t the world belong to your Huang family sooner or later? My men are all from the Xiutu Tribe and absolutely trustworthy, so Marquis can put your mind at ease.”

Zhao Mu’s heart was fluttering on hearing this, thinking to himself that his Father really knows how to use people. This Wang Zhuo is not only intelligent but bold as well, not to mention his excellent swordsmanship. With this

person's help and with Le Cheng's coordination, the position of Zhao Ruler will certainly belong to him. The biggest obstacles will be the two fellows Lian Po and Li Mu.

Zhao Mu said, "I've been thinking the whole night and finally thought of a workable plan, but now the time is not yet ripe. I will discuss with you again at a later date. As that muddleheaded King Xiaocheng has very high expectations of you, you'd better show some results as soon as possible."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing that the most important part was his last sentence. He stood up and said, "Thank you for the reminder. I will immediately bring my men to the new farm outside the city to discuss how we can set up the place."

Zhao Mu's original intention was to look for him to pay a perfunctory visit to Lord Longyang, who was interested in Xiang Shaolong, so as to avoid incurring the displeasure of this powerful man from Wei. On hearing this he had no choice but to stand up as well and said, "Don't forget about Guo Zhong's feast tonight, you must come back before dusk."

Xiang Shaolong acknowledged a reply and sent him off before setting off with Wu Zhuo and the rest towards the outskirts of the city.

Wu Zhuo, Jing Jun and most of the others stayed at the Hidden Army Valley where the new farm will be, setting up tents, chopping down trees, repairing bridges and roads, pretending to be preparing for everything. Actually, they are just establishing a foothold, so that not everyone will be captured if anything happens and at the same time to prevent Jing Jun from losing

patience and looking for Zhao Zhi on his own.

Before dusk, Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi and 30 odd highly skilled men from the Elite team rushed back to Handan.

They had just arrived at the city gates when the official on guard duty told him, “His Majesty has orders that Mister Dong enter the Palace immediately to see him.”

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi exchanged looks, both feeling that something is not right for the King of Zhao would not summon him for no reason.

After they exchanged a few words, Xiang Shaolong went to the Palace to see King Xiaocheng under the escort of the Zhao soldiers.

Cheng Xu personally brought him to Wenying Hall, the place where King Xiaocheng usually work in and the person accompanying him turns out to be Guo Kai and not Zhao Mu.

Xiang Shaolong saw that Xiaocheng’s expression remained normal and put his mind at ease. After paying his respects, he sat down at his lower left, facing Guo Kai.

Cheng Xu went to stand behind King Xiaocheng.

Guo Kai gave him a look, indicating that he is taking care of him.

After asking a few questions about the farm, King Xiaocheng sighed and said,

“About the farm, it’s best that Mister Dong slow down the progress for the moment and try your best not to reveal anything.”

Xiang Shaolong was surprised and replied, “Your subordinate will certainly obey your orders, but I wonder what is the reason?”

King Xiaocheng smiled wryly, “It is a must to establish the farm, it’s just that there’s a sudden setback. Let Mister Guo relate this to you!”

Guo Kai gave a dry cough before speaking with his weird voice, “It’s all that Li Yuan’s fault. Who knows how he managed to find out that Mister Dong trip this time is to return to your home country. When he met his Majesty this morning, he said that although you are a Zhao, you’re still a subject of Chu and if we allow Mister to stay in Zhao, it will have negative impacts on both country’s relations.”

Xiang Shaolong is so angry his lungs are almost bursting. This Li Yuan is obviously jealous to see Ji Yanran seated on the same table as him last night and talking to him so closely, therefore he’s deliberately spoiling his plans. Without a doubt, he must have said other bad things about him as well. Luckily King Xiaocheng is really in need of him, otherwise he may very well bind him up immediately and send him back to Chu.

King Xiaocheng said seriously, “Of course I will not take his comments to heart, it’s just that the situation now is very delicate. His sister is the beloved concubine of the King of Chu and when the time comes for the powers to unite, if he says anything to the King of Chu and advises him not to send troops to deal with the Qins, then our ‘alliance’ this time will fail. That’s why

at this point of time we have no choice but to condescend to him.”

Guo Kai added with a laugh, “Once Li Yanyan gives birth, there’ll be no use even if Li Yuan talks to the King of Chu.”

Xiang Shaolong laughed together with them.

Of course he knows that Guo Kai is inferring that the King of Chu is someone who will never make a woman give birth to a boy, so Li Yanyan will be no exception. But he knows that the real person who did it this time is Lord Chunshen and not the King of Chu, so there’s at least a 50 percent chance that it will be a boy. Guo Kai’s assumption may not be accurate. But of course he cannot be blamed, for who would have expected such a twist in this.

Xiang Shaolong had a thought and asked, “Should I keep away for a while?”

King Xiaocheng replied, “You must not, for it would mean that I would have to act according to Li Yuan’s likings. I told him at that time that Mister Dong has not decided whether to stay or leave, and managed to drag this matter for now. That’s why now I’m asking Mister to keep a low profile for the time being and only start on the foundations after Li Yuan has left.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly overjoyed but pretended to be helpless as he replied, “In that case I’ll have to send someone out to stop the delivery of the horses which are now on their way here. But I’m afraid the earlier batch would have already arrived at the border.”

King Xiaocheng replied, “If it has arrived then so be it! We do need to

increase our number of warhorses, as for the rest we'll just do according to your plan."

Xiang Shaolong was just worrying that he has no excuse to send people back to Qin to report, so he hurriedly agreed.

King Xiaocheng was silent for a moment before he asked with some hesitation, "Last night the Marquis of Julu asked Mister to stay behind after the feast, what did he say to you?"

Xiang Shaolong quietly shuddered as he secretly thought this exciting. He did not expect that King Xiaocheng would actually be suspicious of his 'lover', and of course that conniving devil Guo Kai must have been stirring things up so he pretended to be surprised and exclaimed, "Is there a problem with Marquis?"

Guo Kai reminded him, "You have yet to reply to his Majesty's question?"

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be frightened and after expressing his apology, replied, "The Marquis of Julu opened his heart to me and said he'll take care of me so that I can work my full potential. He also said, hai..."

King Xiaocheng furrowed his brows, "Even if it involves bad things about me, Mister Dong please go ahead and repeat without fear."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "It's not really bad things, the Marquis only said that if he were to put in a few good words for me in front of your Majesty, I'll definitely enjoy riches and wealth. Ai! I am just a boorish man and my only

wish is to rear my horses in peace and to contribute some small effort to my beloved country! Not to mention riches and wealth, even life and death is of no consequence to me.”

When King Xiaocheng heard how Zhao Mu tried to bribe him, he gave a cold snort. But when Xiang Shaolong ‘bared his soul’ in the end, he looked touched and kept nodding his head, expressing his admiration.

Xiang Shaolong continued, “The Marquis even wanted to make me stay at his residence and help me find a courtesan to spend the night with, but I thought that business is more important and adamantly refused.”

Guo Kai said, “His Majesty is very impressed with Mister’s devotion to work, but for the next few days you’d better just go around enjoying yourself. We have a few famous official brothels in Handan, why don’t I bring you there to join in the liveliness tomorrow!”

After some idle talk, King Xiaocheng instructed him not to reveal the contents of their conversation to Zhao Mu before Guo Kai accompanied Xiang Shaolong out of Wenying Hall.

As he walked on the familiar corridors past the buildings, Xiang Shaolong’s feelings can’t help but well up as he thought of the tragic Lady Ni. He didn’t even concentrate on Guo Kai’s continuous babbling next to him.

Guo Kai saw that he looked distracted and thought that he was unhappy about Li Yuan so he consoled him, “Mister Dong, don’t be affected by people like Li Yuan. That’s right! Don’t you have to attend Guo Zhong’s feast

tonight?”

Xiang Shaolong was startled awake, secretly reprimanding himself for having mood swings at this point in time as he exclaimed, “Aren’t you going as well?”

Guo Kai smiled, “I’ve already rejected the invitation. Ever since the arrival of the important officials from the eastern states, I’ve been so busy that I can’t breath. Just the writing of the proposal for his Majesty is enough to make me lose sleep for a few days.”

Xiang Shaolong was about to reply when a group of horsemen surrounding a horse carriage slow rode towards them from the road on the left.

A lewd look appeared on Guo Kai’s face as he said quietly, “Lady Ya is here!”

Xiang Shaolong had already recognized Zhao Da and his men and has already stopped to let the group past first.

Zhao Da and the rest all paid their respects to Guo Kai.

Just as the horse carriage was about to turn into the square, the curtains of the carriage was raised, revealing a pale and tired looking Zhao Ya who is obviously lacking sleep. When she saw Xiang Shaolong, she did not reveal any look of surprise, as if she already knows that he is in the Palace. She cried out daintily, “Stop the carriage!”

The carriage and her men stopped.



Zhao Ya's pretty eyes, which were still alluring, first landed on Guo Kai's face as she said with a smile, "How are you, Official Guo!"

Guo Kai was captivated as he replied, "How can I be good when I have not played the zither or chess with Lady for such a long time?"

Xiang Shaolong was livid on hearing it and wished that he could give Zhao Ya a tight slap for she is really not showing any self-respect at all.

Zhao Ya saw Guo Kai flirting so outrageously with her in front of this horse fanatic and replied with embarrassment, "Mister Guo must be joking." Her eyes turned towards Xiang Shaolong's face and asked gently, "Is Mister Dong going to the Guo residence. If you don't mind, why don't you go together with Zhao Ya!"

Xiang Shaolong replied icily, "Thank you Lady for your kind invitation, but I feel like walking alone so that I can think about some matters."

Guo Kai thought that he was still troubled over Li Yuan's matter so he didn't feel anything out of norm. Zhao Ya guessed that he was taking revenge on her because she had rejected him so rudely last night. She was secretly cursing this person for being so stubborn, which is so much like Xiang Shaolong.

Her heart softened as she said lightly, "In that case I will not force Mister."

The horse carriage slowly rode towards the gates of the Palace.

Xiang Shaolong rejected Guo Kai's suggestion of taking the same carriage, saying "I love riding horses, and can only feel safe and satisfied on a horse's back. Mister, please ask your guards not to follow me, let me stroll around on my own and at the same time think about some matters."

Guo Kai asked with doubt, "It's the first time you've been to Handan, how would you know how to go to the Guo residence?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled, for he knows that it's easiest to let the cat out of the bag with inconsequential details such as this so he replied offhandedly, "Please do not worry, I have already asked for directions."

He jumped up his horse and left, waving his hand.

Once he left the Palace gates, Xiang Shaolong allowed his horse to stretch its legs and in a short moment, he has already caught up with Zhao Ya's carriage.

Lady Ya heard the sounds of the horse's hooves and saw him riding majestically towards her. Her pretty eyes can't help but light up, but a cloud quickly came over them again.

Ever since Xiang Shaolong left Zhao, she has felt pain that was never felt before with guilt and regret biting her heart and soul like poisonous snakes. In order to forget this man who has taken her heart, her actions became even more brazen than before but Xiang Shaolong has always been in a deep corner of her heart, a position that cannot be replaced. During this time she got close with Han Chuang, thinking that she can successfully forget about

Xiang Shaolong but the appearance of this Dong Kuang has ignited a wondrous excitement and memory, making her lose interest in Han Chuang.

Xiang Shaolong deliberately refused to look at her and in an instant has left her far behind.

The houses in Handan are all lighted up by now and as it's right after dinnertime, there's not much people and carriages on the streets. Everywhere was quiet and peaceful.

Xiang Shaolong thought of his beloved wives and maids in faraway Qin and felt warmth in his heart. He wished that he could capture Zhao Mu alive immediately, kill Le Cheng and return home.

While traveling up the hilly road leading to Guo Zhong's residence, he heard the sound of hooves behind him and on turning back for a look, it turned out to be Zhao Zhi coming after him.

Once Xiang Shaolong saw that it's her, he remembered Jing Jing as well as Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo's suggestion and immediately felt a headache coming on as he slowed down.

Zhao Zhi was next to him in an instant and rode together with him, looking at him deep in the eyes and said, "Mister Dong seems to be very familiar with the streets of Handan!"

Once she said that, Xiang Shaolong immediately know that she has been following him for a distance, only choosing to catch up with him now. He was

secretly lamenting as he replied, “Before I came, someone has already pointed the way here to me. Is Miss Zhi going to the Guo Residence for the feast as well?”

Zhao Zhi did not answer him but just stared at him and said, “I’m afraid Mister is deliberately lowering your voice and making it sound hoarse!”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting. If she is sure that he is Xiang Shaolong, a mere fake mask won’t be enough to trick her. This time he has no choice but to use love to get what he wants. He sighed and executed his special move, pressing his hand on the horse’s back, jumped up into the air and just as Zhao Zhi was gasping in surprise, he landed neatly behind her. His hands went forward, tightly hugging her tiny waist that has not an ounce of extra fat, pressed his face against hers and said, “Miss Zhi’s words are really strange. Why would I deliberately make my voice sound like that?”

Zhao Zhi was greatly embarrassed and she struggled hard for a while but under such a situation this would only serve to increase the contact between them. She exclaimed in surprised anger, “What are you doing?”

Xiang Shaolong chortled as his hand reached out and grabbed her chin to turn her pretty face, giving a fierce kiss on her dainty and wet lips.

Zhao Zhi moaned, as if lost in his manliness and flirtation, but was suddenly conscious as she elbowed him hard on his vulnerable armpit.

Xiang Shaolong groaned as he flipped over the horse’s butt. Although it was indeed painful, it was not as bad as he exaggerated, for he just wanted to

give her an opportunity sooth her ego.

Zhao Zhi was so frightened that she turned her horse around and rode back to where Xiang Shaolong was lying. She jumped down the horse, knelt next to him and cried out, “Dong Kuang! Are you alright!”

Xiang Shaolong opened his eyes, his arms reached out and hugged her close to his body again before turning around, pressing her down on the grass at the side of the road.

Zhao Zhi’s body went weak with his hug yet she is unwilling to be taken advantaged of by him. Most importantly she is still not sure if he is Xiang Shaolong, so if she allows herself to be kissed again, then won’t she be betraying the man she secretly loves. Hot tears ran down her eyes as she cried out, “If you molest me again, I’ll kill myself!”

Xiang Shaolong did not expect her to be so protective of her chastity and formed a newfound respect for her. However he knows that if he were to leave her now, the situation would be even more embarrassing and before knowing if she has found out the truth, he cannot reveal his real identity. Therefore he can only press her down hard and asked gently, “Do Miss Zhi hate me?”

Zhao Zhi feels as if her body has no intention of rejecting him at all and was feeling both angry and troubled. She closed her pretty eyes, allowing the tears to flow freely as she said weakly, “Let me go quickly, if someone passes by and sees us, I’ll be finished.”

Xiang Shaolong lowered his head, kissing away one of her teardrops before hugging her into a standing position and said, “Miss is too alluring, please forgive me for being unable to control myself.”

Zhao Zhi seems shattered as her tears flowed like the river, shaking her head piteously and saying, “You’re just making fun of me. Why do you still want to lie to me, I know that you are him.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly sighed and still continued talking gently in his hoarse voice, “I’ll come to your house tonight to look for you, all right?”

Zhao Zhi snapped her dark eyes opened in joy and nodded her head vigorously.

Xiang Shaolong used his sleeve to wipe away her remaining tears and felt a little guilty as he said, “Come! We’ll be late if we don’t start moving.”

Zhao Zhi struggled out of his embrace and said quietly with her head lowered, “Zhao Zhi will wait for you at home tonight.”

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, “Aren’t you going?”

Zhao Zhi smiled and pouted, “You’ve made me look like a mess, how can I go and face others.”

She jumped up her horse’s back and rode out a few steps, her head turned around and hands waving, a sweet smile on her lips. The look of love on a young girl’s face made Xiang Shaolong’s heart skip a few beat faster.

Until she disappeared from sight, Xiang Shaolong recollected his thoughts and went towards the Guo residence to attend the feast.

Guo Fu's feast tonight has a lot less guests. Besides Zhao Mu, Le Cheng, Han Chuang and Zhao Ba, there's Li Yuan whom Xiang Shaolong does not wish to see at all and adding him and Zhao Ya, there's only 7 people. Guo Zhong's 2 sons did not attend, for maybe they are working elsewhere.

Guo Zhong is not as warm to him as last night, instead focusing his attentions especially on Li Yuan, as if he is the main guest.

Xiang Shaolong is already used to seeing how capricious people can be and knows that Guo Zhong is deliberately treating him coldly so that he could get into the good books of Li Yuan, who can possibly become Chu's most powerful man.

Li Yuan maintained his politeness towards this love rival but Xiang Shaolong can clearly feel the hatred from him.

That's understandable, for he witnessed last night during the dance performance how Ji Yanran was talking closely with him. With his intelligence and understanding of Ji Yanran, it's not difficult for him to see that this rare beauty has an interest in him.

After some idle talk, Zhao Mu made an excuse and pulled him aside, asking in a low voice, "Why did his Majesty summon you?"

Xiang Shaolong was waiting for this question and replied, "They asked me

what have you told me last night. Of course I won't reveal the truth so I only said that we were discussing about matters concerning the setting up of the farm. Marquis! It's not I who is overly worried, but that muddleheaded ruler King Xiaocheng seems to be suspicious of you, I think Guo Kai must have secretly betrayed you!"

A frightening icy glare shot past Zhao Mu's eyes as he said with a cold snort, "I will show them my prowess at a later time!"

Xiang Shaolong knows that he has already forced Zhao Mu up the path of rebellion. Right at this time Zhai Ba walked over and they hurriedly changed the topic to more idle talk.

Zhao Mu said with a smile, "Your pretty disciple is not accompanying you to tonight's feast?"

Zhao Ba replied, "She should be coming, I've just sent someone to look for her."

The sounds of accessories clanging were heard as Zhao Ya floated over.

Guo Zhong expressed his apology to Li Yuan, Le Cheng and Han Chuang before going to receive her.

Zhao Ya's eyes first landed on Xiang Shaolong before moving to where Han Chuang and Li Yuan stood. She hesitated for a moment before walking towards Xiang Shaolong.



Xiang Shaolong deliberately refused to look at her, his eyes turned to look at other places.

The layout this time was the same as the one Ji Yanran used during her feast in Daliang, with a big round table in the middle of the hall with 10 seats.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly counting in his heart, even if they included Zhao Zhi, there's still an extra seat, so he wonders which esteemed guest has yet to arrive.

A fragrance wafted close and after Zhao Ya greeted the various people, she commented to Xiang Shaolong just as he turned his head back, "Mister Dong's horse is really fast, you arrived so much earlier than me."

Xiang Shaolong smiled suavely, as a form of reply.

Just at this time, someone arrived.

Under the accompaniment of 2 maids, a pretty young girl who has taken much care to dress up walked in gracefully. Zhao Mu and the rest all looked surprised, obviously no one knows who she is.

Guo Zhong personally unveiled this mystery. The merchant chuckled and said, "Xier'er! Come and greet our important guests." He then told everyone, "This is my youngest daughter Xiu'er!"

Zhao Mu exclaimed in surprise, "So it's Master Guo's treasured daughter. Why have you kept her away for so long, only giving us the pleasure of seeing

her today.”

Xiang Shaolong had a thought, and guessed that Guo Zhong has the intention of marrying his daughter to Li Yuan so that if Zhao falls into trouble in future, they can hide in Chu, who would not be at the forefront of Qin’s attack and continue with his trade.

A great merchant like Guo Zhong whose trade is in making steel and weapons will be welcome in any country but with the protection of a powerful official like Li Yuan, things will run a lot smoother for him.

With the situation now, besides the 3 states, Chu is the furthest away from the invading Qins. Qi is near 3 states, so they face the danger of close proximity, and as for Yan, after the defeat by Tian Dan, have become weak. Only the state of Chu, which is at the far north, is still strong and still safe for the time being. As long as the 3 states are still around, the Chus need not worry that the Qins would risk engaging in war with another state.

The Wu family has successfully migrated to Qin, so Guo Zhong, as an astute businessman, would naturally have to plan for himself.

At this time Guo Xiu’er daintily walked to where everyone was and paid her respects.

This young lady who is not older than 16 is slim and attractive with an egg-shaped face with delicate features. Her pretty eyes look as if they could talk and as clear as autumn’s water, which added to her allure. The corners of her mouth curved up slightly in a shy smile, her face radiant. Her beauty is almost

comparable to Wu Tingfang. Everyone was attracted, including Li Yuan.

Guo Zhong saw what was happening and was extremely pleased so he waved and said, "Xiu'er, come quickly and greet Mister Li."

Guo Xiu'er's pretty eyes saw Li Yuan and they immediately lighted up but her head lowered shyly as she moved towards them. Everyone immediately had the feeling that they have been disregarded while Zhao Ya's expression looked unnatural.

Zhao Mu gave a sideways look towards Li Yuan, a flash of murderous intent flashing past which he quickly covered up but it did not escape Xiang Shaolong's sharp eyes.

Zhao Ya can feel her heart inclining towards this Dong Kuang whose crudity and gentleness cannot be deciphered. She moved nearer to him and said, "Would Mister be free to come to my place to take a look at the horses I keep, so that Zhao Ya can seek your advice on rearing horses."

Zhao Mu thought that she has finally decided to obey him and get close to this 'Wang Zhuo' so he said with a smile, "It's rare that Lady has given her invitation, so let me accept on his behalf."

There's no way Xiang Shaolong can make Zhao Mu lose face in public so he had no choice but to nod his head. Zhao Ya saw how hesitant he was in agreeing so she rolled her eyes at him but did not talk about the date or time.

The gong sounded and it's time to be seated for the feast.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Mad with Envy and Hatred**

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Either deliberately or coincidentally, Xiang Shaolong's seat was placed next to Zhao Ya, and on the other side of Zhao Ya was Han Chuang, Guo Xiu'er, Li Yuan, Guo Zhong while on Xiang Shaolong's right there were Zhao Ba, Le Cheng and Zhao Mu. Zhao Zhi's seat has been taken away.

Now everyone knows that the real main lead is Li Yuan, who is seated between Guo Zhong and his daughter. This person is a good talker and in no time at all, Guo Xiu'er was constantly covering her mouth and laughing lightly very amicably. It seems that as soon as Li Yuan is willing to nod his head, Guo Xiu'er will belong to him.

Han Chuang is obviously very interested in this outstanding and pretty young girl but because he has to regard the State of Han's foreign relations, he dare not pit himself against Li Yuan. He concentrated on having a private conversation with Zhao Ya whereas Zhao Ya was deliberating ignoring the horse fanatic as she talked to Han Chuang in an intimate manner, constantly letting out tinkling laughs, which brought much gaiety to the feast.

In order to create more opportunities between Li Yuan and his beloved daughter, Guo Zhong, after making small talk with everyone at the table, turned to face Zhao Mu and Le Cheng who were seated on his left and engaged them in small talk, the topic of conversation always about the officials and wealthy in Handan.

Zhao ba and Guo Zhong were personal friends so he joined this circle of conversation as well. Although Xiang Shaolong pretended to be interested and listening intently, it was obvious that Guo Zhong was disregarding him.

Xiang Shaolong knows very well that Guo Zhong has changed so quickly because Li Yuan has influenced him and from this he can see that this great merchant is feeling pessimistic about the situation in Zhao and is already having thoughts of leaving.

This thinking naturally cannot be hidden from the King of Zhao and Guo Kai, that's why the latter had reminded him to be careful of Guo Zhong.

With the Wu family gone, the State of Zhao seems to be coming to the end of her days and weakening immediately.

What is Zhao Ya's future plan?

At this time the maids came forward to pour wine for everyone.

Li Yuan turned away from Guo Xiu'er to look at Xiang Shaolong and said, "Brother Dong has traveled such a long and arduous journey to come here and I wonder for what reason?"

Everyone could hear that his tone was filled with antagonism so they all stopped talking to see how Xiang Shaolong would respond.

For the first time Guo Xiu'er raised her pretty face and eyed this burly and boorish looking man who is even bigger sized than Li Yuan.

Xiang Shaolong was calm and composed as he narrowed his eyes to look at him, replying offhandedly in his hoarse voice, "What Brother Li loves is beauties, what I love is handsome horses. Brother Li will go wherever the beauty goes while I will go to wherever there are fertile land and water. If Brother Li were to think about your own attitude, you will understand my attitude even more." His reply was just appropriate.

Guo Xiu'er thought that the beauty Xiang Shaolong is talking about refers to her and was so shy that she lowered her pretty face.

The others all did not expect that this boor's argument would be so formidable and were all secretly surprised and at the same time feel a little embarrassed for Li Yuan.

Only Zhao Mu was secretly happy, for he cannot offend Li Yuan so it's most appropriate that Xiang Shaolong does it for him.

Li Yuan's expression changed slightly as a murderous look flashed past his eyes and he said coldly, "Is Brother Dong implying that the water and land in Chu cannot be compared to here?" He had just spoken the words when he realized that he has been caught off balance, for everyone at the table are Zhaos with the exception of Han Chuang, so how can he say such words.

Indeed Le Cheng, Zhao Ba and Zhao Mu, who has long since regarded himself as a Zhao all furrowed their brows.

Xiang Shaolong saw that just a few words could force Li Yuan to stumble and was secretly overjoyed and continued nonchalantly as if he could not see Li

Yuan's anger, saying "Brother Li thinks too far ahead, I'm just making an example. Actually all land has their advantages and disadvantages. The weather down south is temperate and easy to rear horses but the horses reared there may look handsome but are not strong and stout enough and cannot tolerate harsh winds, rain and snow; it's difficult to rear horses in the north but the horses reared there can take hardships and there are less chances of horse plague happening there. That's why the horses of the Xiong Nus are the most famous, precisely because of the cold and hard climate that resulted in the rich quantity of excellent horses."

Everyone was impressed and did not expect Xiang Shaolong to have such insight. He also managed to insinuate with sarcasm that Chu, which is in the south, are engrossed in merrymaking and doesn't strive for improvement at all whereas the states in the north, including the formidable Qin, may be engaged in wars year after year but this has made them groom many a talent and their reputation is higher than the once powerful Chus.

This is indeed a fact. Ever since the tiny Yue successfully attacked Chu, their pride has taken a beating. Adding on to this is their constant failures in their strategies that made their situation go on a downturn.

The first time the 6 states joined forces to attack Qin, it is King Huai of Chu who takes the lead but in practice only Han and Zhao are taking part in the war. The 2 states were greatly defeated by the Qins at Xiuyu, which was within the Han borders while Qi turned around and attacked Zhao and Wei, creating internal strife. Hence Qin took the opportunity to eliminate Ba and Shu, thus increasing their territory twofold, making it close to the size of Wujun and Qianzhong in Chu. Thus the nightmare of the Chus began, letting

them taste the bitter outcome of being just ‘onlookers’.

All along, the Qins are most worried about Qi and Chu joining forces, therefore the Qins ceded some territory to cajole King Huai of Chu to break his friendship with the Qis. However, they went back on their words once they got what they wanted, greatly defeating the Chu army at Danyang, where 80,000 people were killed and took over Hanzhong in Chu. They then proceeded to take over Zhaoling, making them totally lose control over the northwest areas of Yingdu.

This is not the only insensible act committed by King Huai of Chu. Just as he has agreed to work with Qi again, he was again enticed by the Qins and once again changed his mind suddenly, even to the extent of having a marriage agreement with the Qins.

Qi, Wei and Han were furious and sent their troops to attack Chu for going back on the treaty and King Huai was so astounded that he ordered the Crown Prince to go to Qin to ask for Qin reinforcements. The 3 states then had no choice but to retreat. Later the Qins found an excuse to attack Chu and using coercion and persuasion, managed to trick this brainless King into Qin and imprisoned him. He failed in escaping and ended up dying of illness in Qin.

When his son King Qingxiang of Chu ascended the throne, he tried to seek revenge and after being threatened by the Qins, he was immediately scared shitless. Not only did he beg for reconciliation, he even asked for a marriage agreement with the Qins. Like his father, he added another muddled event in their history.



Therefore Xiang Shaolongs words hinted at how the Chus have destroyed their own country because of the people and not because of wars. The most impressive part was that he was insinuating that although Li Yuan looks able, he is in fact a useless man and cannot survive any setback.

Zhao Ya and Guo Xiu'er, eyed both of them with their sharp woman's intuition and they could feel that Li Yuan is like the good looking horses of the south whereas this Dong Kuang is an excellent horse from the north that can withstand hardship. The impression of Li Yuan dropped by a few notches in their hearts.

Guo Zhong looked at Xiang Shaolong in surprise as he reconsidered if it is really most appropriate to hide from Qin in Chu.

Xiang Shaolong argued from an irrefutable point, proving the Chu's fatal weaknesses are indecisiveness, irresoluteness and fear of hardship, each point of his argument drawing blood.

Li Yuan's face alternated between turning red and pale but he was speechless.

What can he say when on the surface, the other party is talking about horses?

Guo Zhong chortled as he tried to smooth things over and said, "Mister Dong's words are always about horses, a horse fanatic indeed. Come! Let's drink a toast."

Everyone raised their cup with the exception of Li Yuan, who was stony faced and did not follow suit, giving others the impression that he was being petty.

After Zhao Ba finished his drink, he raised his cup again, which has just been filled by the maid. He raised his cup towards Li Yuan and Han Chuang and said, "To the cooperation between Han, Chu and Zhao, let us drink a toast!"

Li Yuan seems to have thought of something and his expression returned to normal, looking calm and suave as he raised his cup and drank with a smile. Only then did the tense atmosphere relax a little.

Han Chuang said, "I heard that the King of Qi placed much importance in this meeting in Handan and the Premier Tian Dan is rushing here personally. He'll be here within these 2 days."

Zhao Mu and Le Cheng already knew about this long ago but for the rest it's the first time they've heard of it and they were all excited.

Tian Dan can be considered the real ruler of Qi, without the title and his reputation is comparable to Prince Xinling of Wei.

8 years after the death of King Huai of Chu, the State of Chu was getting weaker while the State of Qi is shining bright, stable enough to fight Qin as an equal. Right at this time, the Qis fell into the Qin's trap and accepted King Zhaoxiang of Qin's suggestion to regard the King of Qin as the Emperor of the West while the Qis will be the Emperor of the East. Meaning that Qin and Qi will split the world equally.

Although 2 days after declaring himself Emperor, the King of Qi was persuaded by his officials to rescind the title of Emperor, but it did nothing to quell his ambition. He subsequently invaded towards the north and south, first destroying Song, then swallowing up a few small states, taking over lots of land but the country's resources were greatly depleted as well due to the invasions, giving Qin, Chu, the 3 states as well as Yan the opportunity to invade Qi. The Yan general Yue Yi invaded Linzi\* and within 5 years took over 70 odd cities, leaving only Ju and Jimo.

\*Linzi – Capital of Qi

Tian Dan is a person who rose up in fame during such difficult times. He was a distant relative of the King of Qi and was initially a minor official in the Palace. Before the Yan army invaded the city, he told his clansmen to saw off the ends of the carriage axles so that when escaping, the carriages will not break down due to the constant knocking against each other and thus successfully escaped. Just this trick of his has revealed his potential of being wise and calm in the face of adversity.

When the Yans attacked Jimo, everyone supported him to be the Commander and right at that time King Zhao of Yan had just passed away and the new King of Yan fell into Tian Dan's scheme, replacing Yue Yi with a useless general. Once this person came, Tian Dan easily swept the Yans out of their borders, and his most famous maneuver was using the Fiery Cow Formation to greatly defeat the Yan army.

Although Tian Dan's fame spread because of this, the State of Qi fell into difficulties, barely surviving until now.

Xiang Shaolong wanted to continue listening when Zhao Ya who was next to him took over the wine bottle from the serving maid and topped up Xiang Shaolong's empty cup with the fragrant wine, her eyes bright as she said softly with a smile, "Mister Dong! If there is anywhere Zhao Ya has offended you, please accept this cup of wine as apology!"

Han Chuang was still talking and did not take notice. Only Li Yuan's eyes flashed a strange glint as he started thinking.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly furious. This woman is really fickle. She was just being all over Han Chuang earlier and now that she was moved by his words, she's trying to get into his good books. However, he has not reached the stage where he would be so ill mannered as embarrass her publicly so he raised his cup and said without feelings, "Lady thinks too much, how could you have offended me! Let me drink a toast to Lady!"

Zhao Ya's pretty eyes looked at him deeply as she raised her cup to drink.

Only now did Han Chuang notice that the secret undercurrent between the 2 of them and a look of unhappiness flashed past his face. If they are in Han, with his position, he'll definitely teach Xiang Shaolong a good lesson but now he can only seethe in his heart.

Li Yuan chortled and said, "Lady! I have yet to offer you a toast today." He raised his cup and offered her a toast from afar.

Although Zhao Ya's good impression of him has been slightly reduced, she still has a slight liking for him. This person's attitude was cold to her last night

and yet now he is making the first move to flirt with her and she can't help but feel pleasantly alarmed as she raised her cup in bewilderment and drank.

Xiang Shaolong knows that Li Yuan is making use of Zhao Ya to give him a blow but he still felt fury rising from his heart, hating Li Yuan and at the same time angry with Zhao Ya for her lack of self respect. Of course on the surface he did not reveal any of his feelings at all.

Li Yuan is not willing to let the matter pass so he continued his flirtation with Zhao Ya, "Lady is such a good drinker. Why don't we find a night and I'll drink with Lady, let's see who will get drunk first."

Once he said that, among the 9 of them seated at the table, 4 of them had an uneasy expression on their faces.

The ones who look most affected was Guo Zhong and Guo Xiu'er, for they both felt that he is not showing them respect by publicly flirting with this beauty who is famed for her wantonness.

Han Chuang transferred his jealousy towards Xiang Shaolong to this newly appeared love rival.

Zhao Mu's expression was also very unnatural, staring at Zhao Ya angrily, wanting her to say something to reject him.

Zhao Ya did not expect the other party to be so bold as to openly invite her for a night of tryst during the feast. Reject? But she can't bear to. Accept? This man who seems even more charismatic than Li Yuan would look down

on her. Her intelligent eyes rolled and she replied, "Since Mister Li is in such high spirits, Zhao Ya will find a day to throw a feast at my residence. Mister must not say that you are not free when the time comes!"

Her pretty eyes then surveyed everyone else as she continued with laughter, "All of you will come and bear witness as to which of us will become drunk first."

Li Yuan was slightly taken aback, for he did not expect this slut to actually reject his advances and can't help but seriously take a look at her for the first time.

Ever since his heart and mind has been taken over by Ji Yanran, he rarely pays any attention to other women. Now that he's looking in detail, he realizes that Zhao Ya is like a fresh flower that has bloomed, with indescribable charm and style and extremely alluring. Such mature beauty is of another description altogether. And on the surface she may look like a flirt and extremely radiant but there's an underlying grace and elegance that no one will dare to belittle. He can't help but feel tempted and only now did he understand why Han Chuang would be so enamored with her.

Li Yuan smiled suavely, "Once the date is set, please send someone to inform me."

Right at this time Zhao Ba interrupted them and everyone started talking about other topics.

Zhao Ya leaned towards Xiang Shaolong and asked quietly, "Satisfied?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly feeling smug, knowing that this wanton woman has once again surrendered to his alternate identity but before he had a chance to talk, Guo Xiu'er stood up and said with a wooden expression, "Sorry! Xiu'er feels a little unwell and would like to go back to my room to rest."

A look of unhappiness showed on Li Yuan's face but he did not say anything.

Everyone knows that this rich young missy is throwing her tantrum at Li Yuan.

Guo Zhong said helplessly, "Help Miss back to her room!"

Immediately the maid came forward to escort this pretty girl out of the hall.

The atmosphere is once again awkward. Without Guo Xiu'er, the feast has lost some of the festivity. Luckily, there is still Zhao Ya to hold the fort.

Zhao Ba had a drink too much and his suddenly felt like talking. He made Xiang Shaolong talk with him about what he feels about swordplay, saying "People learning swordplay nowadays, many of them are anxious for quick results, having only the style but lacking the coordination stability and foundation. They don't even place much importance in training the strength around their waist. They are strong with their arms but weak in their wrists, not knowing that the combination of waist, arms, wrists and foundation are essential in exhibiting the essence of swordplay. Knowing how to make use of strength is the most important requirement."

Li Yuan was proud and obviously holds no regard for this highly respected

swordsman of Zhao as he said nonchalantly, “I think it’s useless to have only brute strength, otherwise Xiao Weimou won’t be killed by Xiang Shaolong!”

The name ‘Xiang Shaolong’ is now a taboo topic for everyone in the city and with the exception of Han Chuang, everyone else was taken aback.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly alarmed to hear his name being mentioned. He glanced quickly towards Zhao Ya only to see her expression darken as she fell into a daze.

Han Chuang said arrogantly, “A pity he escaped to Qin, otherwise I definitely want to try how formidable his swordplay can be.”

Zhao Mu replied through gritted teeth, “Won’t you have the chance once we attack Xianyang in future?”

Zhao Ba was unhappy with Li Yuan’s interruption but he could not win the argument so he said solemnly, “Mister Li is famous in Chu for your swordsmanship. I wonder if you can find a day to come to my school so that it can be an eye-opener for me.”

Li Yuan’s eyes flashed as he nodded his head, “Every time I go someplace, I like to find the most famous swordsman of that place to exchange pointers. Headmaster Zhao’s suggestion is precisely what I would have wanted.”

This time even Le Cheng was annoyed by this person’s arrogance and said to Zhao ba with a laugh, “Mister Li is so valiant. Headmaster, please set a date and time so that we can admire Mister Li’s excellent swordplay.”



Zhao ba was obviously secretly livid as he said, "I am getting a little impatient, why not do it tomorrow! We shall see what time is most convenient for Mister Li."

Li Yuan replied smugly, "Not tomorrow, for I've made a date with Miss Ji Yanran to tour Handan. Why don't we change it to noon the day after!"

Everyone was taken aback and all of them looked both envious and jealous.

Xiang Shaolong's heart sank and turned cold. Why did Ji Yanran agree to accept this person's invitation? He must get an explanation from her.

Zhao Ya's expression was wooden. Naturally she would not feel good to have her thunder stolen by Ji Yanran.

The atmosphere of the feast is now broken beyond repair and Zhao Ba was the first to give an excuse to leave, followed by Zhao Ya.

Han Chuang stood up and said, "Let me accompany Lady Ya back!"

Zhao Ya was troubled and creased her brows as she replied with a shake of her head, "I appreciate Marquis Pingshan's kind intentions, but Zhao Ya's head is feeling a little heavy and would like to have some peace alone."

A look of unhappiness flashed past Han Chuang's face as he said icily, "Whatever Lady wishes then!"

Zhao Mu stood up and said, "Let's leave together! I'm in the mood for talk, so

who is willing to share my carriage.” He gave Xiang Shaolong a look.

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly nodded his head and said, “I’m the only person who came alone, let me accompany Marquis then!”

Zhao Ya looked at Xiang Shaolong with puzzlement, feeling dubious about their relationship.

Everyone bid their farewells and left the Guo residence separately.

Inside the carriage, Zhao Mu said, “I did not expect Mister to have such a sharp tongue, even the glib tongued Li Yuan couldn’t fend you off. I wonder if you’re confident of winning the sword in his hand. From what I know this person is truly skilled.”

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brows, “Confidence is besides the point. It’s just that only wooden swords are used to exchange pointers in the dueling ring, not as if there’s a fight for life and death at all...”

Zhao Mu interrupted him, “I just want to put him down a peg or two, not kill him. That fellow is too detestable, if I capture him, I’ll definitely f\*ck him until he feels that death would be a better choice.”

Goose pimples rose immediately on Xiang Shaolong’s skin as he gave a cold shiver.

## Chapter 6

### Sisters in trouble

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After returning, Teng Yi said quietly to him, “Yanran is waiting for you at the inner hall.” Xiang Shaolong was just about to look for her and quickened his steps on hearing that.

Teng Yi ran after him and asked, “Why did the King of Zhao summon you?” Xiang Shaolong was embarrassed and stopped to tell him briefly what happened and laughed, “We’re considered lucky, there should be no problem if we stay in Handan for 1 to 2 more months.” Teng Yi gave him a push and said, “Go in quickly! You’re really lucky in love.” Xiang Shaolong did not expect this burly man to suddenly utter such a phrase. Obviously Shanlan has changed him a lot. He replied with a smile and walked towards his bedroom.

He had just closed the door when the great beauty Ji Yanran ran into his arm with a gush of fragrance, her passion so fiery that he almost melted.

Women who have just started eating the forbidden fruit will be especially clingy and Learned Lady Ji is no exception. After the joining, they started talking, limbs entwined.

Before Xiang Shaolong had a chance to ask her about Li Yuan, this beauty admitted it first, “Xiang Lang, please don’t blame Yanran. I’ve agreed to go with Li Yuan tomorrow to Lake Feng at the south of the city to admire the red

leaves. Hai! This lovelorn person is really sincere, to run after me all the way from Chu and kept on pleading with me. Yanran had no choice but to entertain him a little. I will then find a chance to clarify with him my stand and tell him to give up on me.”

Xiang Shaolong remained silent on hearing how Ji Yanran is still treating Li Yuan so nicely. Ji Yanran pouted a little, “Are you unhappy? It’s just a normal outing! If you’re still worried, I’ll ask Mister Zou to come along.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed and said, “From my observation and information obtained, this person’s interior is not as good as his exterior but if I say this at this point of time, it would seem that I lack graciousness.”

Ji Yanran disengaged herself from his arms and sat up on the bed, revealing her perfect upper body to his eyes as she said unhappily, “Do you think I am a person who would see you as someone carrying tales? I already belong to you while in Daliang, so why should you be afraid to speak your mind.”

Xiang Shaolong pulled her back into his arms, flipped her over and pressed down on her, telling her how he made use of Li Yanyan to take part in the evil scheme set up by Lord Chunshen, and also what happened at the feast tonight.

When Yanran heard how Li Yuan was pressurizing the King of Zhao to deal with her ‘Xiang Shaolong’, and how he publicly announced during the feast about his appointment with her, her expression changed and she said, “I did not expect him to be such a shallow and conniving person, Yanran must really be blind.”

Xiang Shaolong replied, "This person may have had a hard time suppressing himself in Chu so now that he's in Zhao, he would reveal the real him when he's not afraid that others will know."

Ji Yanran breathed out a gush of cold air as she said, "Luckily Xiang Lang has reminded Yanran, so I won't be taken in by him. Hai! When can Xiang Lang take me to Xianyang? It's really torturous being so secretive. Mister Zou is also very envious of Qin and hopes that he can go there quickly."

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "Who wouldn't want to leave this godforsaken place, it's just that now we still have to wait for the right time."

Ji Yanran sat up unwillingly and said, "I have to go. This time you don't have to send me off, it'll be difficult to argue if someone bumps into us." Then added with a smile, "Why don't we put on another show, the title of the act will be called 'The Horse Fanatic gets Ji Yanran'. If we can infuriate that Li Yuan to death, won't it be fun? Then we don't have to be so secretive and scared all the time. I can even openly move in to stay with you."

Xiang Shaolong sat up, hooking his arm around her pretty neck and tasted the lipstick on her pink lips again as he said, "It's 'The Horse Fanatic having sole possession of Beauty Ji', or maybe 'Fanatic Dong flirts with pretty Yanran'. This is a very tempting thought, but if it incurs the jealousy of Lord Longyang, then it'll be really terrible."

Ji Yanran replied with a smile, "This Lord Longyang likes to think that he's smart. If we do it just right, seemingly having feelings at times, moving along in steadily, it will instead quell his doubts and it will even make him think that

I have nothing to do with that Xiang Shaolong, otherwise why would I have fallen for another man. She added with a sweet smile, “The terms Xiang Lang uses are the best in the world.”

After being on cloud nine, Xiang Shaolong thought over it and found it reasonable and was greatly energized. If he can eliminate Lord Longyang’s suspicions of Ji Yanran, it’ll be easier for their mission in future. Otherwise if they let this man-woman find out about their affair, his identity may be revealed immediately. Because there’s no way for him to hide if they decide to look at his false face in detail.

To the Zhaos, it’s better to let him get Ji Yanran than to let Li Yuan have the advantage. The 2 of them were so excited they started their entanglements again before discussing the details.

Xiang Shaolong remembered Zhao Zhi, and it was only after much persuasion that Ji Yanran reluctantly left him quietly.

Xiang Shaolong took the opportunity to take a nap after Ji Yanran left and Teng Yi woke him up at midnight.

This guesthouse originally had a housekeeper and a group of servants but they have been transferred to work at the outer residence to stop them from being a hindrance.

While he was washing up, Teng Yi said from behind him, “A few suspicious looking men started hiding around the front of the street and back alley an hour ago. I wonder who they could be. Really feel like going out to teach

them a lesson.”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “It’s easy to teach them a lesson. We just have to inform Zhao Mu tomorrow. That conniving thief will certainly have his ways to find out who they are.”

Teng Yi said, “Be careful when you go out. I think I’d better go with you, at least I can take care of you.”

Xiang Shaolong guffawed, “I’m just going for a rendezvous, why would I need to be taken care of.”

Teng Yi no longer insisted and changed the topic, “When do you intend to make contact with the 2 groups belonging to Pu Bu and Zhao Da?”

Xiang Shaolong wore his mask and said, “We can only decide on this at a later date, and we must not let them know that Dong Kuang is Xiang Shaolong. A person’s heart is unfathomable, who knows if any one of them would betray us?”

Teng Yi heaved a sigh of relief and said, “I’m relieved to know that you can think it this way.”

Xiang Shaolong gave him a strong hug around the shoulders and after he helped him with wearing his full gear, he climbed over the wall and left the residence, turning into the dark streets.

Although it’s late in the night, there are still carriages and people on the

streets as well as patrolling guards. The cities of this era are huge and not as densely populated so general security is still good.

Keeping alert along the way, he reached his destination an hour later. He's still worried about being followed so he deliberately hid on a tree, waiting until he was sure no one was following before jumping down and walking into the bamboo forest next to Zhao Zhi's house.

It was an ordinary house, only slightly bigger than the average home. What's special is that there's a small river on the left while this bamboo forest is on the other side, separating this house from the nearby houses. This bamboo forest is also the path that one must go past in order to reach the house.

Xiang Shaolong cast aside his remorse towards Jing Jun, consoling himself by thinking that small details should not be haggled over if one wants to accomplish big things before walking out of the bamboo forest.

The deep barks of dogs were heard, then they were silent. Obviously Zhao Zhi had stopped them.

Zhao Zhi's residence is split into the front, middle and back, with a small courtyard at the back planted with flowers and trees. The surroundings have a quiet elegance.

The rooms at the back were joined with the garden so he only have to climb the wall into the back courtyard and will easily reach Zhao Zhi's bedroom.

Right at this time, the lamp in one of the rooms was lighted, and then



extinguished again. It continued for 3 times before it remained lit.

Xiang Shaolong knows that this is Zhao Zhi's signal, and excitement welled in his heart from having an illicit affair. Zhao Zhi wins in being matured enough, a unique character and style that can intoxicate a person. The deepest impression she gives is that although she is not past 20, she has an air of weariness as if she has been through a lot. It seems that she must have had a sad past.

Xiang Shaolong knows that there's not much time left. A moment of night is worth a thousand taels of gold. He moved swiftly, climbing over the wall into the house and entering through the window.

It turned out to be a small study, simply and comfortably decorated. Zhao Zhi was wearing a pale maroon long dress, lounging on a rectangular bed, the table next to her filled with fine wine and snacks, looking at him climbing in through the window with a smile.

Xiang Shaolong was about to smile in return when an alarm suddenly went off in his heart but before he had the time to react, something is already pressing down on his waist from the back.

The reason why he did not have a proper feel is because it's separated by the belt that was filled with flying needles tied around his waist.

A low but melodious female voice behind him said, "Don't move, unless you can move faster than the specially made mechanical strong bow."

Xiang Shaolong felt the voice sounded familiar but he could not remember who this person threatening him from the back could be.

Zhao Zhi jumped up excitedly and exclaimed with a dainty smile, “Everyone keeps saying how formidable Xiang Shaolong is, but he still fall into us sisters’ trap.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing dryly, this is the second time he got cheated by a woman. Maybe this is a man’s greatest weakness, always putting their guards down when faced with a pretty woman.

But he was feeling puzzled. If Zhao Zhi wants to deal with him, she just has to run out to the streets and start shouting and he’ll be done for, so why would she go through so much trouble to deal with him privately.

Or could it be she still has feelings for that dead Lian Jin? She won’t feel happy unless she kills him personally? He pretended to be surprised and said, “What is Miss Zhi talking about? Who is Xiang Shaolong?”

Zhao Zhi exclaimed angrily, “Still denying! Haven’t you already admitted while on the road to the Guo Residence?”

Xiang Shaolong deliberately antagonized her, “Who told you that I am Xiang Shaolong?”

Thinking back, Zhao Zhi realized that indeed he has not admitted to it but at that time his mannerisms and the way he talked is exactly like Xiang Shaolong. Now that he is denying it, it’s obvious he’s making a fool of her.

The lady behind him, who could either be Zhao Zhi's younger or older sister, said in a low voice, "If you're not Xiang Shaolong, than my only choice is to silence you immediately so that our secret will not be leaked."

Xiang Shaolong's heart shook, he finally recognized that this lady behind him is the female assassin who tried to assassinate Zhao Mu twice, the first time was a mistaken attack on the carriage and the other time happened the night before, which was thwarted by him.

What he couldn't figure out earlier suddenly became clear. No wonder the female assassin could sneak into the Marquis Residence, all because of Zhao Zhi who helped with the spying.

He sighed and said, "Then I'm dead for sure, because I don't even know who Xiang Shaolong is. I thought it's because Miss Zhi had taken a special liking to me..."

The lady behind said fiercely, "If you say one more time that you're not Xiang Shaolong, I'll retaliate immediately!"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly sniggering and thinking it'll be a miracle if she can shoot past those steel needles and said with a cold snort, "I, Horse Fanatic Dong Kuang, never likes to be threatened and neither am I afraid of death. If I am not Xiang Shaolong, I am not so why should I pretend to be. If you don't believe me you can come and scrutinize my face to see if I have done anything to it?"

This is called making a calculated bet, betting that never in their dreams

would they imagine that in this world, there will be such a leather mask made so delicately by Xiao Yuetan and this mask has a natural stickiness that will stick so perfectly onto skin that not a gap can be found such that even facial expressions can be shown. If one doesn't know how, it won't be easy to remove the mask at all.

Zhao Zhi was momentarily stunned and came forward, extending her hand to touch his face.

Zhao Zhi touched and grabbed for a while before her expression changed thoroughly as she exclaimed, "Heavens! You're really not him!" Xiang Shaolong replied, "I may not be Xiang Shaolong, but please don't shoot, otherwise it will be a lose-lose situation." The 2 women were equally stunned and knew that something is not right.

Fast as lightning, Xiang Shaolong escaped from between the women and came to Zhao Zhi's back, his hand pulling out the dagger at his waist smoothly and placed it across Zhao Zhi's neck while his other hand was wrapped around her alluring waist, taking control of the situation.

That lady raised her strong bow, aiming at them but she dare not shoot.

Xiang Shaolong pulled Zhao Zhi along as he backed up to the wall before he steadied his nerves to weigh this female assassin whose swordsmanship and stratagems are both astounding.

She is a little shorter than Zhao Zhi, looks about 70-80% similar to her, but is more fair and delicate looking. Her eyes are sharp, with a hardness and

viciousness that Zhao Zhi lacks. She is a little older, her body graceful and packed with power and now she looks like a female leopard that's about to find someone to bite.

Xiang Shaolong asked with a smile, "How do I address this elder sister here?"

Zhao Zhi ignored the sharp knife pointed at her throat and cried out piteously, "Eldest Sister release the arrow quickly, otherwise not only won't we be able to take revenge, living will become even worse than dying."

Xiang Shaolong was relieved for he knows that Zhao Zhi really believe that he is that horse fanatic Dong Kuang so he hurriedly said, "We can talk things over slowly. I can swear not to reveal your secret. I'm a man of my words and will never go back on my promises."

The 2 of them can't help but look at each other. Since this person is not Xiang Shaolong, there's no reason for him to let them off. This is too illogical.

Xiang Shaolong did not give them a chance to speak. He first made a very deadly vow in Dong Kuang's name before saying, "Elder sister, put down your bow and arrow and I'll release your sister."

The pretty female assassin replied resentfully, "Who is your Elder sister?" But her hands naturally loosened the hold on the strong bow, throwing the bow and arrow aside, so coolly that it seems a little irrational.

Xiang Shaolong was thinking that this beautiful tigress is quite straightforward so he kept the dagger that was placed on Zhao Zhi's pretty

neck.

Right at this time, he saw this woman give an eye signal to Zhao Zhi and knows that something is not right so he hurriedly move to the side and just happened to avoid Zhao Zhi's elbow.

That lady let out a high pitched whistle and at the same time pulled out the long sword from her back and launched an attack towards him.

Xiang Shaolong was furious. He was kindhearted enough to make a deadly vow not to reveal their secret because he did not want to silence them but not only did they not appreciate it, they are trying to silence him in turn. Blood Wave came out of its sheath lightning fast.

There was a strange sound coming from the door and he turned his head around to take a glance and secretly cursed. It turned out to be a large yellow dog, running through the door in an alarming speed, revealing its white teeth, the nostrils flaring and a thunderous growl from deep within its throat, jumping towards him. He suddenly realized that her whistle earlier was to summon this ferocious dog to help her.

Luckily in the past, one of the modules he was trained in was how to deal with aggressive dogs and although he has never put it to the real test, he had trained and fought with the military dogs that were even more muscular than this yellow dog. He swept his sword across to block the coming stab from the other party, lowered his body and kicked sideways, aiming right at the lower jaw of the ferocious dog that was in midair jumping towards him.

The beast howled as it was kicked aside and tumbled to the ground, unable to get up for the time being.

Zhao Zhi managed to grab a sword from somewhere and coordinated her attack with her sister, one attacking from the left and the other from the front and for a moment swords were flashing everywhere.

Xiang Shaolong knows that this 2 ladies are formidable but he has long since familiarized himself with the 3 killer moves of the Mohist addendum so his swordplay is not as unskilled as in the past. Since the ferocious dog has not pounced again, he took the chance to dash to the side of the elder sister and using all his tactics, slashed his sword down from the top.

The elder sister was shocked. It turned out that Xiang Shaolong's move was excellent and wondrous, for it can keep on changing in such a narrow space, making one totally clueless as to what is happening. She gritted her teeth and attacked the onslaught, not caring about the enemy's sword at all as she aimed lightning fast towards Xiang Shaolong's heart, absolutely having the intention of dying together.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly admiring her character and this is just what he wanted as well. He had crossed swords with her before and knows that the style of her swordplay is fast and ever changing and if someone unskilled fights with her, that person may be dead even before he gets to touch her sword. This is also a woman's distinctive way of using the sword so that they need not match their strength against men who are stronger by nature.

He immediately changed his move and swept his sword across to block.

‘Clang!’ The sound reverberated sharply, the pretty assassin’s sword was blocked by Xiang Shaolong’s sword.

Since she wants to launch an attack against another attack, she will have to use all her might and there is no room for retreat and this instead gave Xiang Shaolong the chance to use all his strength to fight with her.

Besides Xiao Weimou and Teng Yi, Xiang Shaolong’s waist and arm strength can be considered unbeatable. Now matter how formidable she is, she is still a woman and restricted by her nature. As the swords struck at each other, the vibration caused her wrists to go numb and she retreated in astonishment.

Xiang Shaolong thought that he would be able to disarm her but who would have expected her to tolerate the effects, although barely. She gave a cold snort as she rolled towards the ground.

Zhao Zhi did not expect this horse fanatic to have such shocking swordsmanship and just as she was about to run up to help out, her retreating sister happened to knock into her and both of them tumbled back.

Right at this time that yellow dog came back again and was about to pounce on Xiang Shaolong. Zhao Zhi cried out in alarm, “Dahuang! No!”

By this time Xiang Shaolong is already holding the bow in his right hand and an arrow in his left hand, aiming towards the top agilely towards that Dahuang.



This dog is very smart and well trained by the 2 ladies. Once it saw the arrow pointing at itself, it gave a low moan and hid behind the 2 ladies.

Xiang Shaolong held the bow with his right hand and the sword with his left hand, pointing it at the 2 terrified ladies and asked with a smile, "What is elder sister's name, so that I know how to address you."

The 2 ladies were still feeling unsettled and cowered at the corner of the wall, not daring to move at all. In such a narrow space and short distance, it is ridiculous to think that one can fend off the light arrow shot by the strong bow.

The elder sister is very stubborn, her lips were drawn tight and she did not answer him. Instead it was Zhao Zhi who blurted out, "Her name is Tian Rou!"

Xiang Shaolong was surprised, "Shouldn't her surname be Zhao?" Zhao Zhi realized that she has slipped up and her face turned pale.

Xiang Shaolong and that Tian Rou looked at each other. He thought that since her surname is Tian, maybe she is related to Tian Dan. Zhao Mu has all along been in cahoots with Tian Dan, otherwise he wouldn't be in secret contact with Xiao Weimou. Once he thought of this, he had a slight idea of what's happening so he pretended to be furious as he stared widely and said, "I actually had the intention of letting both of you go, but a pity that your surname is Tian and I hate people with this surname. Now I can only abandon all thoughts of taking pity on beauties and send you back to where you came from before you were born. You should be grateful to me for giving you an

easy death.”

Zhao Zhi looked at the bow and arrow he held in his hand and trembled, “Why do you hate those with the surname Tian so much.”

Tian Rou hissed angrily, “Zhizhi! Don’t talk to him, let him kill if he wants to!”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly feeling perplexed, could it be that there’s only these 2 sisters in this house. Otherwise with such a commotion going on, not a single person has appeared. And where has Zhao Zhi’s ‘father’ whom she live with hidden himself? Once he thought of this, he saw the ears of the yellow dog which Zhao Zhi was holding on to perk up as its eyes shot to attention. He secretly understood and shouted, “Don’t come in, otherwise I’ll shoot immediately.”

The 2 ladies were shocked. They did not expect that he’d actually detect their help who is stealthily nearing them soundlessly and suddenly a sense of weakness and helplessness welled up in them as they felt that there’s no way they can deal with this person.

Xiang Shaolong looked at Zhao Zhi and said, “Since you are already at death’s door, there’s no need for me to hide anything from you. The reason why I hate people with the surname Tian, is because one of them is called Tian Dan!”

The 2 ladies were momentarily stunned as they stared at him. Xiang Shaolong moved forward slowly, his arrow moving up and down so that the 2 ladies have no idea the targeted area he has chosen.

A very tempting thought occurred to him. He just have to shoot Tian Rou, then use his flying needles to deal with the person outside the door and Zhao Zhi. He is 100% sure that he can swiftly deal with all 3 of them and that will settle everything and there'll be no need to trouble himself over them anymore.

A old sounding voice outside the door shouted, "Hero please have mercy, Tian Dan is also the enemy of my 2 Missies, we're all on the same side."

Tian Rou and Zhao Zhi cried out in unison, "Uncle Zheng!"

Xiang Shaolong said with a frosty laugh, "How do I know if this is true? I deliberately told you this so that I can force myself to harden my heart and silence you. Otherwise if you leak this out, and Zhao Mu, who is in cahoots with Tian Dan, finds out, I'll be dead. Or maybe you still do not know that Tian Dan will be coming to Handan within these few days and this is the only chance for me to take revenge. I will not allow anyone to thwart me."

The 2 ladies were visibly moved, obviously they do not know that Tan Dan is coming to Zhao. Tian Rou's eyes opened widely as she stared at him, "Aren't you with Zhao Mu?"

Xiang Shaolong shouted, "Shut up! Who would be this conniving thief's partner! I'm just pretending and gaining his trust so that I can deal with Tian Dan. Hai! I've never killed women, I'll have no choice but to start tonight."

That Uncle Zheng who was outside the door cried out in alarm, "Hero do not be rash, the death of my 2 Missies' family were caused by Tian Dan and Zhao

Mu. This is absolutely true, if there's any deceit in this, then may I die without a burial place with thousands of arrows piercing my heart."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be deep in thought and said, "There's no doubt that both of you has a deep enmity with Zhao Mu, but one of them is in Qi while the other is in Zhao, so how did they become your enemies?"

Zhao Zhi cannot control her tears as she cried piteously, "My family was harmed by Tian Dan and forced to escape to Handan but who would have expected that the conniving thief Zhao Mu would actually capture all 183 people in my clan and ordered men to send us back to Tian Dan, where they were all tortured to death by him. Would you believe if I say this?"

Tian Rou said angrily, "Don't beg him." Xiang Shaolong said with a smile, "Although there's a 'Rou'\* in your name, you're not gentle at all."

(Note: Rou, meaning gentle)

Tian Rou was so furious that she couldn't speak. Xiang Shaolong added, "Why are the 3 of you left then?"

Uncle Zheng's voice drifted in, "The 2 Missies and I were late by a few days, that's why we escaped the calamity. For the past 7 years, we've been constantly thinking of revenge, Hero, please believe us."

Xiang Shaolong was relieved, and feeling a little guilty that he wanted to kill them earlier. Living in this warring era where lives are cheap, it's really easy to become influenced.

Xiang Shaolong released the trigger and the arrow shot between the 2 ladies faces with a whoosh, into the wall.

The 2 ladies were dumbfounded; they did not expect him to shoot at this moment. If the target is any one of them, they certainly won't be able to avoid it.

Xiang Shaolong threw the strong bow aside and kept his sword in the sheath as he said with a smile, "I am not interested in interfering in your matters, but I ask that you do not come and spoil my plans. Your real enemy is Tian Dan and not Zhao Mu and now that Zhao Mu is on the alert, to strike again would only be giving yourselves up for capture. Think about it! Such pretty girls like the both of you, if you fall into the hands of the evil, you will face a humiliation even worse than death. This is my advice, farewell!"

Under the amazed stare of the both of them, Xiang Shaolong strode towards the door and came face to face with that Uncle Zheng before leaving leisurely.

## Chapter 7

### Glib-tongued

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By the time Xiang Shaolong returned to the guesthouse, it's about 2 more hours to dawn. After telling Teng Yi what happened, he stretched and yawned.

Teng Yi sighed with admiration, "You've done this beautifully, Zhao Zhi no longer suspects that you are Xiang Shaolong. But from what I see this little lass has no ill intentions towards the real you, she just wants to coerce you to deal with Zhao Mu."

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed, "Her intentions are so good that she has to use that strong bow to aim at my back."

Teng Yi replied, "You spoiled that Miss's grand plan of assassination twice and that Tian Rou is so competitive so naturally she'll want to put you down a little."

Xiang Shaolong remembered that he was teasing Zhao Zhi while on the way to the Guo residence, the way she halfheartedly rejected him indeed reflected her interest in him. Now that she has 'mistakenly' think that the person who took advantage of her is 'Dong Kuang' and not 'Xiang Shaolong', how would she feel?

He remembered when she 'realized' that Xiang Shaolong is actually Dong

Kuang, the look of disappointment on her face is something that cannot be faked.

Teng Yi said with a smile, "Since you're under imperial orders not to work hard, we don't have to pretend so why don't all of us go and have a good sleep. Who cares what will happen?"

Xiang Shaolong thought that sounded right, so he returned to his bedroom to have a good sleep. By the time Wu Guo came to wake him up, it was already past lunch and the sun is almost setting.

This is the first time in so many days that he's slept so soundly. Wu Guo said, "Second Master is waiting in the hall for Third Master for dinner!"

Xiang Shaolong got up energetically and after washing up went to meet Teng Yi. The 2 of them had a hearty meal.

Wu Guo said from the side, "Lady Ya sent someone here with a message, asking Third Master to go to her residence tomorrow night for a feast. She will send someone to pick you up and hopes that you will be able to go over to her place earlier."

Only now did Xiang Shaolong remember that she promised Li Yuan a feast last night. At that time he thought that she did not mean it, so he did not expect her to really be serious about it. He said with a wry smile, "Look why we are here in Handan, almost every night I have to go and socialize with those people."

Teng Yi said with a laugh, “It’s not difficult to deal with Teng Yi, but dealing with those women is enough to make you suffer.”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “I really want to give Zhao Ya a good f\*ck to ease the hatred in my heart but this way she will surely be able to recognize me. Like what you’ve said, once she uses her nose to sniff, there’s no way I can hide. Besides this expert in man is so familiar with my body.”

Teng Yi shook his head and said, “I too, feel sad for your situation... oh!” His expression changed and he said, “It’s not totally hopeless. While I was feeling bored yesterday, I took a walk at the back garden and there is a kind of plant there. If we take the sap out and smear a little on the body, it will emit a smell very similar to that of a human body. It smells quite good, and a lot more natural than the fragrances women use to suffuse their clothes. This will solve the problem of scent. If there’s not special marks on your body like moles or birthmarks, you may be able to make your way through the act if you extinguish the lights and do her in the dark.”

Wu Guo who was at the side can’t help but interjected, “Third Master’s thing is certainly bigger than the average person, Zhao Ya will know once it goes in.”

Teng Yi and Xiang Shaolong wrapped their arms around their stomachs and bowled over in laughter.

Xiang Shaolong said breathlessly, “You’re such a bootlicker. But I was just saying it for fun, not that I really want to do her, nor is it worth taking such a huge risk. Hai! To treat her like an object just to expend my lust is not really



very appropriate after all.”

Teng Yi tried to control his laughter as he added, “But there’s no harm applying a little of the sap of that ‘love plant’, so there’ll be no problem even if you get a little closer with Zhao Ya. I’ll go and prepare it immediately.”

Wu Guo was dumbfounded, “To think that it has such a nice name.”

Ever since Teng Yi had Shan Lan, he became a lot happier and easygoing. He extended his hand to pat his shoulder and sighed, “Now you’ve learnt something, this kind of love sap has slight aphrodisiac properties and women all like the smell of it. Young men from the villages around Jing Jun’s age all like to apply some on their body when they go on dates with ladies. But it has to be mixed with rice water, otherwise it will cause the whole body to break out in rashes. Do you want to try?”

Wu Guo replied excitedly, “I must find a beauty to test this on once we get back to Xianyang.” Xiang Shaolong asked, “Are there any other matters?”

Wu Zhuo answered, “Headmaster Zhao of the Martial Arts School has sent someone over with an invitation, saying that the Sword Meet tomorrow has been postponed to noon the day after and asked that Third Master must attend.”

Xiang Shaolong told Teng Yi, “The other conniving devil Li Yuan is too detestable, maybe I will teach him a good lesson.”

At this time someone came in to announce, “Lord Longyang is here to see

Third Master and is waiting at the outer hall right now.”

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback and asked Teng Yi with a dry look, “Are there any sap called ‘Demon Riddance’ to make him run to the other end of earth once he smells it.”

Teng Yi guffawed, “This is the first time that I will not envy Third Brother’s luck in love!”

On seeing the outstanding horse fanatic Dong Kuang striding out, Lord Longyang stood up gracefully with a pose that ‘he’ thinks is the most beautiful and even greeted him in the way a lady should greet.

Xiang Shaolong has no idea whether to laugh or cry and was secretly lamenting to himself but he pretended to smile and welcome him, “Lord is showing me such favor by coming here personally.”

Lord Longyang’s expressive eyes flitted towards him as he replied with a slow smile, “I came today to look for Mister Dong because something is troubling me and I won’t feel happy until I say it.”

Today he’s gone back to dressing as a man but his clothes and accessories are still very colorful. If he’s a real woman, Xiang Shaolong would certainly compliment her for her grace but now his heart is palpitating. If the things that he won’t feel happy unless he says it are lovey-dovey words, heaven knows how he should deal with that.

After the both of them were seated, Lord Longyang said seriously, “I think

that Mister Dong's decision to return to Zhao is really too rash."

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback, but also secretly relieved as he asked in bewilderment, "Why would you say that?"

Lord Longyang saw that there's no one around so he continued gently, "I admire Mister Dong's talent, that's why I'm speaking my mind with no restraints. The state of Zhao is now like a well that is almost drying up, so no matter how strong Mister is, how perfect and ample is your tools for filling and fixing the well, if you try to protect this well faithfully, ultimately you cannot escape the fate of the well drying and you dying."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled. All along he has little regard for this high ranking fellow who got his position from using his male charms to entice the King of Wei but now that he has heard his expressive analogy and how he has illustrated the state of Zhao straight to the point, he can't help but see him in a different light. He pretended to be surprised and said, "The Zhaos have recently gained a huge victory over the Yans, so how can they be a well that's almost drying?"

Lord Longyang said with a smile, "A dying person will have times when there's a surge of energy before they pass on, and the sun is the most beautiful right before dusk. And this is because Zhao still has 2 famous generals to hold the fort. Once these 2 are gone, do you think Zhao can produce any elixir to prolong her life?"

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Are you referring to Lian Po and Li Mu?"

Lord Longyang replied, “Exactly these two. Lian Po is getting old, he can still defend but will have problems attacking. Recently there are rumors about his incapability in attacking Yan. King Xiaocheng has all along been suspicious of him so now there’s talk in Handan about changing generals, no one knows if history of exchanging Lian Po with Zhao Gua will repeat itself.”

Without giving him time to interrupt, Lord Longyang continued smoothly, “As for Li Mu he is loyal and straightforward but doesn’t know how to flatter others and not glib enough. If he is under an able ruler, he will become a formidable general who can conquer the world. Pity he is under King Xiaocheng, a person who is overly suspicious and only craves stories of success. With the Marquis of Julu at the side navigating his thoughts, he will not come to a good end. A pity that he is not afraid of death and is stoutly loyal, refusing to leave, otherwise everyone in Great Wei, from the ruler to the officials, will all welcome him with open arms.”

Once he said that Xiang Shaolong knew immediately that the Weis must have made contact with these 2 famous generals. Li Mu has rejected, but he wondered what is Lian Po’s reply. This Lord Longyang is indeed formidable, if he is able to remove the 2 huge military pillars of Zhao with just some words, won’t the state of Zhao be under the mercy of the Weis?

Lord Longyang saw that he was engrossed and thought that he has shaken his stand and tried to entice him further by saying, “Mister Dong may be wondering why am I so bold as to criticize the Zhaos in their capital. Firstly I do not hold them in regard at all and I bet they won’t dare to do anything to me. Most importantly I really admire Mister Dong very much and does not wish to see your hard work go down the drain in future, or even ending up as

a slave from a defeated country. Besides, the Qins and the Zhaos have deep enmity and will never let them off. A good bird will choose a good tree to nest in, so if Mister is willing to come and work for Great Wei, I guarantee that the houses and gifts offered will be something that the Zhaos cannot give. At least we won't be chasing Mister away in panic just because of a few words by the lackey of Lord Chunshen, Li Yuan, who has no power at all."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly thinking him formidable, knowing that Lord Longyang has spies around the King of Zhao, that's why he knows how to grab the best opportunity to cut in and persuade him to work for Wei instead.

He can't help but admire his father-in-law, Wu Yingyuan's foresight to give him this horse fanatic identity. Now all the various states place much emphasis on battles on horses and him as Dong Kuang is the dream talent of all the other states.

He pretended to be moved and said, "Your words are indeed thought-provoking, I will consider them carefully and I still have to explain to my clansmen. But for now..."

Lord Longyang saw that he did not reject immediately and looked ecstatic. He cast a flirting look at him and said, "I understand the problems faced by men, Mister Dong need not worry. It's best that you can find out the situation in Zhao, so that you will know that I have not lied."

Xiang Shaolong can't help but admire his skills of persuasion. Just a few words and he has revealed all the problems of Zhao. He sighed in reply, "If I

am not a Zhao, I would have agreed immediately.”

Lord Longyang said gently, “To King Xiaocheng, other than the Zhao family, who else does he consider a Zhao? If it’s not Zhao Mu or Zhao Ya, anyone else who loses favor like the Wu family, would have been torn to pieces by him long ago. He does not treasure a talent at all and Xiang Shaolong is the best example. If Mister has not given them a thousand high quality warhorses, in less than a year, the Zhaos will not have any useful horses left.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly thinking that this person is really vicious. By pulling him away, it’s akin to breaking the legs of the Zhaos.

Lord Longyang lowered his voice and said, “I heard that Zhao Ba had acceded to the request of that conceited Li Yuan and will be holding a Sword Exchange Meeting the day after at noon. If Mister will just nod your head, I can order someone to take him down a peg or two on that day, let’s see if he still dares to be so arrogant.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled. Every time they talk about Li Yuan, Lord Longyang seems to be very angry. With the looks and build of Li Yuan, it’s impossible that Lord Longyang won’t take a liking to him. It seems that maybe Li Yuan has once rejected him with harsh words, that’s why his love has turned into hatred.

Or maybe he does not like the kind of gentle and pretty faced men like Li Yuan, but likes rough and stout men like him... heh! What are his thoughts leading him to?

Surprisingly, Lord Longyang stood up and said before he left, “Mister, please think it over carefully and let me know once you have an answer. We’ll then discuss the details and I’ll make sure Mister will leave happily.”

Xiang Shaolong was confused by his terms of address\* and hurriedly sent him off. He only turned back with a wry smile after seeing him go up the carriage and left under the accompaniment of 10 over followers.

(Note: Lord Longyang was addressing himself as ‘I’ in 2 ways, interchanging between the position of a Lord (Ben Jun) and the position of a lady (Nu Jia). I just used ‘I’ because I can’t think of any English terms that can indicate ‘I’ to be spoken by a lady or an official.)

No matter what, he will never dare to belittle this she-male.

After Lord Longyang left, Xiang Shaolong enjoyed the free time and took a leisurely walk alone in the garden of the residence, thinking back about the intoxicating time when he snuck in here and first met Zhu Ji.

No matter what kind of a person Zhu Ji is, he can really feel her liking for him, and this is something that cannot be faked.

Suddenly, he felt a little melancholy and lost as well as loneliness. In fact he should feel even more satisfaction than anyone else. As a modern person, to come to this strange yet familiar warring states era, his life is at least an era richer than anyone else from any era.

Because he has experienced one more era.

After spending a few difficult years here, even the way he thinks, the words he uses are now similar to the way of the people in this era.

Last night, his thoughts of silencing others and to kill the girls, is exactly what Wu Zhuo and Teng Yi would have thought the most appropriate thing to do.

Luckily he turned himself back in time, otherwise he would feel guilty for the rest of his life. Once he thought of this, he can't help but feel a cold relief for himself.

By now it's deep into autumn and the weather is turning cold. The garden is filled with fallen leaves and in the darkening dusk, it gives a feeling of stern desolation.

Sometimes feasts are not that bad. During those senseless socialization and mundane festivities, one can easily numb and forget oneself.

Unconsciously, his thoughts turned strongly to his pretty wives and maids at faraway Qin, thinking of how they are pining for his return everyday and can't help but feel a sense of loss.

He can't help but randomly recited one of Li Bai's poems, "Leaving me, yesterday cannot be asked to stay; Troubling me, today's day is filled with worries."

Applause could be heard from behind.

Xiang Shaolong was startled and turned around suddenly to see Teng Yi



accompanied by Ji Yanran who was elaborately dressed up and looking as pretty as the moon, both staring at him with wide open eyes.

A strange gleam flashed past this beauty's eyes as her pretty mouth mumbled and repeated these 2 verses from the famed ancient poetry.

Xiang Shaolong was embarrassed and went forward to say, "Yanran, how can you hide from other people's eyes by coming here like this to see me?"

Teng Yi replied, "Yanran is now on the way to the Palace to attend the King of Zhao's feast and can't help coming in to visit you when she passed by the guesthouse. She has no intention of hiding from anyone at all. Hei! Those 2 verses of poetry you recited earlier were excellent. All right! You two have a good talk!" He then made himself scarce.

Ji Yanran smiled enticingly as she threw herself in his arms and sighed with admiration, "Today Li Yuan showed me the poetry he wrote and Yanran is already very astounded and greatly admires his talent, but compared to the 2 verses you said earlier, Li Yuan's verses were as uninteresting as a child's toy. Who can make references as captivating as you? Yanran admits defeat."

Xiang Shaolong blushed, luckily Ji Yanran couldn't see it as he hugged her tightly and said, "Don't praise me, this is called beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

Ji Yanran trembled as she left his arms, looking intently into his eyes and said, "Heavens! The words you spout at random are always so exciting and unique. I still remember your words 'Absolute power will only result in absolute

disintegration’, this phrase exactly describes the problem of all the states at this time, even Master Han Fei could not come up with such an extraordinary phrase.”

After saying all these she can’t help but kiss him passionately, almost melting him.

After they parted, Ji Yanran said in a haze, “Xiang Lang! Compose a poetry for me! I’ll add melody to it and make it into a famous song for centuries to come.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing ironically, there’s no poems that he can recite from the start to the end, so what can he use to deal with this lady. Besides, using other people’s works as his own is like plagiaris. It’s all right if he just recites it, but if it really goes down in history, won’t he have stolen other people’s creative rights first, so he replied with a wry smile, “Everything in this world will fade away like smoke, so what if it becomes famous for centuries?”

Ji Yanran sighed delicately as she collapsed on his body, pouting happily, “Shaolong! You’re really the cause of my downfall, what else can Yanran think of tonight besides you? But yet I cannot be with you. I don’t care, from tomorrow onwards, you will have to pursue me openly so that I can officially surrender to you. This is one thing that you cannot allow to fade away like smoke.”

She continued with a sigh, “Fade away like smoke! How pitiful and yet beautiful it sounds, only you are capable of suddenly spouting such a natural

yet excellent verse.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting, for this is making matters worse. If in future she keeps on forcing him to compose poems and verses, won't he become the pirate of the literacy world.

Ji Yanran said sorrowfully, “Yanran has to leave, Mister Zou is waiting for me in the horse carriage. Why not this! Once you've composed a poem, I'll compose the melody and only sing it for you. I know Yanran's husband does not hanker for fame or fortune. Hai! Fame and fortune are indeed troublesome, if no one knows who is Ji Yanran, then I'll be able to be with you all the time.”

She smiled slightly and added, “Don't move!”

She kissed him lightly before flitting away, not forgetting to turn back again to smile at him, making Xiang Shaolong totally lose his senses.

When he returned to the inner residence, Teng Yi said, “Only now do I understand why Learned Lady Ji will fall into your hands. Those 2 verses are really incomparable works, touching the hearts even more so than the ‘Book of Poems’. I'm sure you're very familiar with those poems.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that besides the verses ‘Elegant and noble ladies, are the pursuit of gentlemen’, he knows nothing about the ‘Book of Poems’, so he can only mumble a reply.

Teng Yi said, “That muddleheaded King Xiaocheng is really hopeless. If you

are really the horse fanatic Dong Kuang, you should try to slip away immediately. Look at how much he fears Li Yuan. His feast for Yanran tonight, he has invited almost everyone with some status, except for you.”

Xiang Shaolong was enlightened, no wonder Lord Longyang left in a hurry, so he was rushing to the Zhao Palace for the feast. He replied with a smile, “It’s rare to have free time like this, why don’t we go and take a walk to the official brothel here and drink to our hearts content.”

Teng Yi said seriously, “Most of the ladies in the official brothels are pitiful girls, can Third Brother bear to disregard them in the name of fun?”

Xiang Shaolong thought of Su Nu and a sense of guilt washed over him as he said, “Second Brother has reprimanded me rightly!”

Teng Yi nodded his head, “You’re indeed a rare man, to be able to accept another person’s idea so willingly. Come! We’ll just go out for a stroll and sightseeing, that is also another kind of enjoyment.”

The 2 of them left the residence. After they left the guesthouse, they strolled towards the liveliest area in the city of Handan.

The pedestrians on the roads were few, and it looks a little desolate, a vast difference from before they left Handan.

What happened to the Wu family was a great blow to the Zhaos, and this capital of the Zhaos directly reflected this truth.

The fear the Zhaos have of the Qins is understandable, the massacre of Changping has scared them out of their wits.

Guo Zhong has a huge family and business here, so he cannot just pack up and leave but for ordinary citizens they could not be bothered with that much. They just have to find an excuse to slip out of the city and they will be able to escape to another village or another state.

Such migration is a positive function towards the unification of China, slowly weakening the concept of 'state', which will be beneficial to the aspect of unification.

Now the 7 states are fighting for power, and it seems a little like royalty with different surnames struggling for power.

Teng Yi's words startled him from his thoughts as he heard him say, "Someone is following us."

Xiang Shaolong was alert but did not turn around. He asked quietly, "How many people?" Teng Yi said calmly, "At least 7 to 8 people, quite highly skilled."

Shaolong thought hard, "I'm afraid it's the people who were watching us outside the residence last night. Who in Handan would do this?"

Teng Yi smiled, "Won't all these be clear if we catch one of them and grill him?"

Xiang Shaolong understood and followed him into a quiet and isolated little lane with trees on both sides and a stone bridge in front. After passing the river, a scattering of houses could be seen on the opposite bank.

Before they could reach the bridge, hurried footsteps were heard from behind and someone shouted, “Dong Kuang, stop!”

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi looked at each other and smiled as they stopped and turned around nonchalantly.

20 odd burly looking swordsmen surrounded them in a fan shape and some went by the back via the woods to circle them, placing them in the center of the circle.

Xiang Shaolong took a clear look and recognized none of them. He had a thought and shouted, “If Li Yuan is that capable he can kill me himself, why did you send nobodies like you to come and die?”

The swordsmen were all alarmed, it seems that Xiang Shaolong was right and he has uncovered their identities.

Before those people had a chance to retort, the two of them took this opportunity while their opponents were still stunned to pull their swords out and attacked. The sounds of swords clanking rang out.

Those people did not expect their opponent to suddenly start the fight without a warning and hurriedly drew out their swords to block the attack.

Xiang Shaolong gave a cold snort as he used all his strength to execute his killer moves. The first of the enemy who reached him had his long sword knocked aside followed by an immediate kick on his stomach and that person screamed as he fell back, curved up like a prawn.

On Teng Yi's side, the crisp sound of metals clanking was heard and the sounds of weapons dropping to the ground and groans rang out, obviously someone has taken a huge beating.

Although Xiang Shaolong's first attack was successful, he did not slow down as all these people are experienced, good fighters and although they lost the advantage of being the first to attack, none of them retreated. Two long swords were aiming towards him from his left and right side as swift as the wind.

Xiang Shaolong continued while he still had the upper hand and moved to the right towards the especially stout looking man and swept his sword across to block. 'Clang!', that stout looking man met his sword head on fiercely without fear.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly thinking that it's an excellent fight as he executed the 'Attacking instead of defending' stance from one of the 3 killer moves in the Mohist addendum as he slashed fiercely towards his opponent's sword. That person is indeed skilled as he moved back and avoided the attack.

The long sword from the left aimed towards his chest.

Xiang Shaolong made a fake move as he avoided his opponent's vicious attack. If he were to release his flying needles now, his enemies will certainly be unable to escape but he must stop such an enticing thought because unless he can kill all his enemies and remove all evidence, otherwise the Zhaos may find out that he's Xiang Shaolong based on this.

Just as this thought was flashing past his mind, a long sword came alarming close towards his back. With a backhand slash of his sword, Xiang Shaolong chopped heavily on the sword near the handle. This person cannot be compared to the earlier stout looking man and Blood Wave chipped off a part of the long sword and the sword fell to the ground as the man lost his grip.

Xiang Shaolong knocked into him hard in order to avoid that stout man's sword attack again and elbowed that person's chest hard.

The sounds of bones cracking were heard as fresh blood spurted from his enemy's nose and mouth as he stumbled, knocking another enemy who was coming up from the side.

'Clang!'

Xiang Shaolong blocked the sword attack from the stout looking man, suddenly stooped down and gave a quick sweep with his leg.

That stout looking man did not expect such a weird move at all and gave out a cry as his legs flew out from under him and he turned a somersault in the air before falling heavily on the ground.



Right at this time more long swords came attacking again. This group of people are indeed fearless, and it took quite some effort fending them off.

If he did not have Teng Yi with him, then he can't be so sure of winning if he's alone.

There's no need for him to further injure that stout looking man so he executed the defense stance of the Mohist swordplay, forcing the 3 men at bay.

At this time Teng Yi gave a snort and knocked into his back, obviously he has taken some beating.

Xiang Shaolong took time off to turn around for a look and saw that 3 of their enemies are already on the ground but there were another 5 or 6 charging towards them like rabid tigers, viciously attacking Teng Yi, who shouted "Go into the woods!"

His swept his enemies away with his sword and just as he gave a flying kick to one of them, another one slashed him on the shoulder. Although it was not a deep wound, but blood still flowed profusely, dying his shirt red.

Teng Yi roared as he knocked off the weapon of one of the enemies and his iron fist crushed into that person's face and he fainted immediately.

The danger has lessened slightly as the both of them fought a bloody path out into the woods.

Those people had fear struck in them after some of their men were killed and no one dared to run after them. They whistled and helped up the injured and ran towards the other side of the bridge.

Teng Yi was about to give chase when Xiang Shaolong pulled him back and said with a smile, “Let them leave! Even if we catch them it’ll be a wasted effort, for in the end won’t we still be unable to touch Li Yuan?”

Teng Yi exclaimed, “You’re injured!”

Xiang Shaolong took a look at the wound on his left thigh as well and said with a smile, “Just a little more serious than yours, it’s nothing! But this batch of swordsmen are indeed formidable, no wonder Li Yuan is so arrogant.”

Teng Yi chortled, “We really think too lightly of our enemies.”

Xiang Shaolong wrapped his arms around his shoulder as both of them went back laughing and joking. But in his heart he was thinking of how terrible Li Yuan’s expression would be when he see his men coming back injured.

## Chapter 8

### Affections of a pretty girl

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After Xiang Shaolong bandaged the wound on his shoulder, he might as well not wear his top and just wrapped a cape around and started practicing his writing on the table in the study.

Coming to this era, the first thing he has to overcome is the language, the accent and the way they habitually speak and the terms used. Either because he is especially talented, or maybe because he has no other choice, but he was able to handle such things within about half a year.

But as for writing? Until now, which has already been a few years, his words is still illegible. The ancient calligraphy of this era is really baffling him, and the problem is compounded by having to write on bamboo slips or cloth.

Luckily he regarded practicing calligraphy as an interest and since there's no Wu Tingfang or anyone else harassing him, he can take the opportunity of this free time to practice.

Just as he was totally immersed in the world of brush and ink, Wu Guo came in to report, "Miss Zhao Zhi is looking for Third master."

Xiang Shaolong guessed long ago that she will look for him so he replied, "Let her come in!"

Wu Guo's gaze landed on his table filled with his crooked and clumsy words, which looked like a child's handwriting and asked hesitantly, "Do you want me to help you tidy up the things here first before asking her in."

Xiang Shaolong knows that he is seriously trying to remind him tactfully that others must never see this splendid handwriting of his so he said with a laugh, "I deliberately wrote it so awfully so that others will know that Dong Kuang is unrefined. My real handwriting is extremely outstanding and you'll surely compliment them once you see it!"

Wu Guo slapped his forehead and said, "Third Master really thinks things thoroughly, otherwise even those who has never held a brush won't have their words end up looking like this." He hesitated, "But is Third Master being a little too exaggerated?"

Xiang Shaolong was extremely flummoxed for this Wu Guo is indeed being quite funny and he reprimanded him with a laugh, "Go and invite the lady in quickly! It's not nice to make people wait that long."

Wu Guo knows that he is an easygoing person who never puts on airs and treats everyone well regardless of rank, and he is already used to joking around with him so he bowed and left after hearing that.

In a short while Wu Guo led Zhao Zhi and came up behind him. Xiang Shaolong's back is still facing the door, as he looked at the garden outside the window illuminated by the moon. He instructed Wu Guo to leave and close the door behind him before telling Zhao Zhi, "Come! Sit opposite me."

He concentrated on his writing while Zhao Zhi went to the other side of his table and sat down delicately, her pair of pretty eyes landed on his snaky and crooked words and exclaimed “Ah!”

Xiang Shaolong waved his brush with a smile, “That’s just how an unrefined person’s handwriting looks like! Hope Miss Zhao won’t find it a joke. Oh! I should be addressing you as Miss Tian instead.”

Zhao Zhi lowered her pretty face, not really daring to look at him directly yet she rolled her eyes at him in rebuke as she said, “You’re really muddleheaded, who said my family name is Tian?”

Xiang Shaolong was astounded, “Didn’t you tell me so yourself? Why have you forgotten about it so fast. Don’t be forgetting about me tomorrow as well!”

Zhao Zhi narrowed her eyes at him before lifting up the brush and wrote a word ‘Shan’, the character delicate and straight, a great world of difference when compared to the characters that Xiang Shaolong has written.

Xiang Shaolong said with embarrassment, “So it was I who have heard wrongly! But something came out of this mistake as well.” Suddenly his body shook, as if he suddenly remembered something important.

Zhao Zhi mistook his meaning and said sadly, “You finally realize that my Father is the philosopher Shan Qin from the state of Qi. He wholeheartedly wanted to help his Majesty run the country well, but that conniving thief Tian Dan thought that Father wanted to reduce his power so he just randomly

made up some proof of rebellion, causing our whole family to escape to Handan in the middle of the night. We thought that Zhao Mu would take us in on account of our longstanding friendship, but who would have known..."

But what Xiang Shaolong thought of was Shan Lan, who is married to Teng Yi. Naturally Teng Yi will know about her background clearly and there's no need for him to ask Zhao Zhi directly in case he leaked out the secret.

Xiang Shaolong asked, "What is Zhao Ba's relationship with you?"

Zhao Zhi wiped away the tears from the corner of her eyes and replied, "None at all, it's just that he is Uncle Zhao Zheng's good friend. Uncle Zhao Zheng used to be a scholar of Zhao, when he was young he followed his mother and came to our house as a servant, and until now he still regards himself as one. If he had not taken my sister and me in, I don't know what our outcome would be. I've long regarded him as my father, so please still treat me as Zhao Zhi."

Xiang Shaolong might as well continue his questioning so he asked, "Why did Miss help Zhao Mu train his dance courtesans?"

Zhao Zhi replied, "My Teacher has a deep friendship with Guo Zhong and Guo Zhong wants to find someone to teach his dance courtesans the sword dance, so Teacher recommended me. Zhao Mu saw that I did quite a good job teaching so he wanted me to train the dance courtesans in his residence as well. We thought that it'll be a good chance for revenge, but once again you saved him."

Xiang Shaolong asked, “Your elder sister is very highly skilled, did Zhao Ba coach her?”

Zhao Zhi shook her head, “Ever since young, Elder Sister has been the closed door disciple of Grand Master Cao Qiudao, who is also known as Sword Saint but gave himself the name of Mister Wang You. I stayed behind with Uncle Zheng while she snuck back to Qi to train under Master Cao. She tried unsuccessfully to assassinate Tian Dan twice and was forced to hide here recently. Now that Tian Dan has come to Zhao, it is indeed Heaven’s gift of a splendid opportunity.”

(Wang You = meaning forgetting sorrows)

Xiang Shaolong asked in bewilderment, “Why is Miss so cooperative this time, answering all my questions with nothing held back at all?”

Zhao Zhi’s pretty face turned slightly red as she replied, “Because I’m grateful to you. You actually repaid malice with kindness, you’re really a good person!”

Xiang Shaolong laughed as he leaned back against the chair and stretched lazily, immediately revealing his muscular and solid chest muscles as well as the bandages around his shoulder.

Zhao Zhi exclaimed in alarm, “You’re injured!” Then she turned her head away and blushed, “You don’t like to wear clothes at home?”

Xiang Shaolong replied nonchalantly, “Miss is unaccustomed to facing an

unrefined person like me!”

Zhao Zhi turned her head back as if she has set her mind on something and looked at him shyly as she replied, “No! Mister’s intellect and skills are way better than others, my sister and I are both very impressed by you.”

Xiang Shaolong guffawed, “Don’t speak on your sister’s behalf, I don’t believe she will ever be impressed by anyone.”

Zhao Zhi revealed a look of surprise as she nodded her head, “You’re really good to be able to see through her character. Indeed she did not say she was impressed with you, but I know that in her heart she is now looking at you from a different light, it’s just that she’s being stubborn and refuses to admit it! She did not object to me coming to look for you as well.”

Xiang Shaolong was puzzled, “Don’t you have to accompany your Master to attend the King of Zhao’s feast? Why do you still have time to come and look for me?”

Zhao Zhi replied, “Precisely because everyone has gone to the Palace, that’s why I sneaked here. That Ji Yanran’s allure is really formidable, everyone is falling head over heels over her. If she is willing to play a tune or sing a song, I think that’ll be a greater knockout.”

Xiang Shaolong was thinking of the good show that is being played right now at the Palace, secretly thinking that if this unrefined man were to woo her publicly and in fact succeed, definitely everyone’s spectacles will fall off their noses, if spectacles were to exist in this ancient era in the first place.



Zhao Zhi saw him smiling strangely and can't help but ask, "What are you thinking about? Hey! Why were you not included in tonight's feast?" I still have not asked you what is the great enmity between you and Tian Dan?"

Xiang Shaolong waved his hands and smiled wryly, "Which of your questions do you want replied first?"

Zhao Zhi's eyes landed in his gleaming chest muscles uncontrollably again and she hurriedly averted her eyes in shock as she said with a sigh, "You're like a mystery, so unfathomable that one can never guess your intentions but if you're Xiang Shaolong, everything would seem reasonable."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "I know who Xiang Shaolong is now, just that I did not expect Miss Zhi is also his woman. This person is really a womanizer."

Zhao Zhi's pretty face turned even redder as she rolled her eyes at him and said, "Not only do I not have a relationship with him, he was initially my enemy as well. Hai!"

Xiang Shaolong asked in bewilderment, "Why did Miss Zhi sigh?" Zhao Zhi replied honestly, "I don't know either, I just feel a little vexed."

Xiang Shaolong said nonchalantly, "Since you are not his woman, then don't think about him. Since that I have already hugged and kissed you, why don't Miss Zhi just follow me!"

Zhao Zhi was astounded, then her whole face immediately burned as she exclaimed 'Ah!' and shook her head violently, saying, "No! No! Ai! Sorry!"

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brows, "I am unrefined and does not know how to flatter women. Initially I thought that Miss Zhi was interested in me, but it turned out to be a misunderstanding. There's nothing to be sorry about, forget it if you do not want to be with me."

Zhao Zhi lowered her head, her expression a little uneasy as she pulled on the corners of her clothes and asked quietly, "You're really not angry with me over this?"

Xiang Shaolong chortled, "D.amn! How can I be such a person. But since you're not my woman, which means you're an outsider. My Father taught me that I must never tell the truth to an outsider, so you can forget about me telling you anything."

Zhao Zhi was thoroughly confused by him so she exclaimed with helpless anger, "Forget it if you don't want to tell me! I'm leaving."

Xiang Shaolong once again lifted his brush to write and replied absentmindedly, "Miss Zhi, please! I won't send you off!"

Zhao Zhi seems to be rooted to the spot and looked at him with interest, "You're angry!"

Xiang Shaolong deliberately refused to look at her, "Is there cause for celebration after being rejected by a woman? If Miss Zhi still refuses to leave, maybe I will forcefully cart you off to the bedroom, by then you will have no choice even if you're unwilling."

Zhao Zhi stood up in fright as she pouted, “You! How can you be so unreasonable, I came here meekly to apologize and discuss things with you yet this is how you treat others.”

Xiang Shaolong’s brush stopped moving as he lifted his head to look at this beauty who is prettier than a flower and eyed her up and down with narrowed eyes, saying “I am a normal man, you’re a lass so sweet that juice is oozing out, this is a quiet room where there’s no one else, so tell me how should I be treating you?”

Zhao Zhi could not tolerate the look in his eyes and fumed, “If you continue like this, I’m really going to leave!”

Xiang Shaolong put his brush down and smiled, “I understand Miss’s intentions now, no wonder people say that no matter how willing a woman is in her heart, her mouth will always say no.”

Zhao Zhi left her seat in shock and moved next to the door before saying with a sigh of relief, “If you continue treating me like this, Zhao Zhi will hate you to the core.”

Xiang Shaolong turned around and said suavely, “Hate is love, hmm! Who was the one who taught me this famous saying. I did not expect that I, Dong Kuang, would finally succeed. Hai! I couldn’t even find a woman to hate me in the past.”

Zhao Zhi pouted, “Other than horses, what else do you know?”

Xiang Shaolong collected his thoughts and mulled over it before answering, “Actually I have no interest in anything else other than horses, but after hugging Miss that night, I realized that a woman’s body is so soft and alluring, heh!”

Zhao Zhi finally could take it no longer and stamped her feet angrily before saying furiously, “I hate you to the core!” before pushing the door and escaping.

Xiang Shaolong looked at the closing door and sighed.

He deliberately made Zhao Zhi angry and leave, otherwise she may find out his secret. Especially when Jing Jun comes back, this lad will surely let the cat out of the bag when he sees her.

Even if there’s nothing wrong with Jing Jun’s expression, but Zhao Zhi has seen him many times and it’ll be easy for her to tell that he is just wearing a mask as his build and movements will reveal the loopholes.

She is not like Tian Zhen, whose only wish is to be with him. If her sister ask her to make use of feelings to threaten him in order to accomplish their dream, that would be terrible.

But if the 2 sisters were to risk assassinating Tian Dan, it would also be a cause for headache. However, for the time being, he can’t think of any plans that can fulfill both ends.

Once he thought about this, he stood up to look for Teng Yi to find out the

relationship between Shan Lan and them.

When Xiang Shaolong woke up the next day, he's still very free. He was secretly finding this ironic. From being a popular person who was all the rage, he has now become an idle man and disregarded. He did not expect Li Yuan to have such influence. If he is the real Dong Kuang, it'll be strange if he is not harboring thoughts of leaving by now.

After he spoke to Teng Yi, he has indeed confirmed that Shan Lan is Zhao Zhi's 2nd sister. The Qis saw that she was pretty so she was kept in the official brothel and given training there so that she can be given away as a gift.

After lunch, Zhao Mu was on the way to the Palace to see King Xiaocheng and came into the guesthouse to see them.

In the quiet inner hall, Xiang Shaolong told him about the ambush. Zhao Mu was silent for a moment before saying, "It must be Li Yuan who ordered this, there's no reason for anyone else to deal with you."

Xiang Shaolong had already guessed this is the case, but he just wants Zhao Mu to say it out himself.

Zhao Mu continued, "Li Yuan is head over heels over Ji Yanran and it was even worse when Learned Lady Ji was seated at the same table with you the other day and both of you were conversing pleasantly. That stirred up his jealousy and he deliberately pressured King Xiaocheng to cast you aside. This matter concerns the relations between the 2 states, and it had to happen at

such a critical time so it's difficult for me to put in my views. Hai! Learned Lady Ji came to look for you again yesterday. Don't talk about Li Yuan being overly jealous, but all the men in Handan who thinks that they are qualified to pursue her are all green-eyed as well."

He sighed again and said, "This beauty is really an excellent treasure. Her song last night, everyone at the feast was bowled over and that Li Yuan even wept. If one can keep her for himself, tell me what more can a man want?"

Xiang Shaolong remained quiet. Zhao Mu can't help but ask, "Why did she come and look for you yesterday?"

Xiang Shaolong pretended to smile wryly and asked, "If I say that she has taken a liking to me, would you believe me?" Zhao Mu chuckled, "Of course not."

Xiang Shaolong continued dejectedly, "I wish that she came to look for me because she could not control her feelings, but a pity she only came to seek my advice because her horse fell sick."

Zhao Mu was secretly thinking that this sounds more logical and said with relief, "I have to go. Bring more men with you when you go out these few days, don't let Li Yuan have another chance again. Our plan can only proceed after the collaboration between the 6 states have settled down so don't do anything for now."

Xiang Shaolong accompanied him to the main door.

Zhao Mu appeared to be in a good mood as he said with a laugh, “I wonder if Learned Lady Ji’s heart has stirred, she seems especially alluring recently. What I did not expect was that she’d even be willing to attend Lady Ya’s feast tonight. Her behavior is extremely different from when she was in Daliang, where she hid herself at home and refused to come out. Now everyone in Handan is rubbing his hands, hoping to win a beauty back. This is even more appealing than winning a great war.”

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brows, “Then won’t the house be filled to the brim tonight?”

Zhao Mu chuckled, “Filled to the brim? This description is really interesting. The phrases you used may be better than Su Qin and Zhang Yi, these 2 famed debaters. Those words you said the other day forced Li Yuan to become speechless and everyone changed their opinion of you. Even that slutty Zhao Ya’s heart was stirred. Just put in a little more effort and you may even be able to go straight to her bedroom tonight? Hei! The allure of this slut on the bed is something you will know only after you try it.”

Xiang Shaolong felt like covering his ears so that he did not have to listen. Luckily by now they have reached the square outside the main building, only to see more than a hundred of the Marquis Residence’s house warriors, and it was the first time Pu Bu and the rest appeared there as well.

Zhao Mu gave a cold snort, “One day I will capture that female assassin and when the time comes, I’ll make sure that living will be worse than death for her. This group of people are the personal guards I recently transferred over and are absolutely loyal but if they fail in their jobs, I will sentence all of them

to death like the last batch of idiots.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled, for this person’s cruel nature makes one turn cold. Everyone, including himself, is just a tool that he can discard at will. If he becomes the ruler, the officials and the people will be in for a lot of suffering.

But this time, this is to his advantage. At least it allows Pu Bu and his men to be closer to him.

Shortly after Zhao Mu left, the horse carriage Mady Ya sent to pick him up arrived, and the person who drove it is Zhao Da.

He trust Zhao Da even more than he trusts Pu Bu and his men so he invited him into the hall and asked with a smile, “Zhao Da, don’t you recognize me anymore?”

Zhao Da was astounded and looked towards him, exclaiming hoarsely, “Master Xiang!” before hurriedly kneeling down.

The two of them felt like they’ve been parted for a long time Zhao Da was so overcome by emotions that he was weeping as he said, “We have been waiting for Master Xiang to return and actually wanted to slip away to Xianyang to look for you but we can’t bear to leave Lady behind.”

After Xiang Shaolong made him sit down, he said, “This time, my identity must not be revealed, otherwise it will bring everyone down, therefore you must hide this even from your brothers.”



Zhao Da replied, “Master Xiang, do not worry. Even if I am to be chopped to pieces, I will never reveal anything about you. Master Xiang trusts me so much...” When he said this, his eyes turned red and he could not continue his words.

Xiang Shaolong replied, “Once this matter is accomplished, all of you will come back with me to Xianyang! Handan is not a place for you to stay too long in.”

Zhao Da was initially overjoyed but his expression immediately dimmed a little as he suddenly knelt down as if he has made up his mind on something and choked, “Master Xiang please forgive Lady! You’re the only one who has a place in her heart even now, she...”

Xiang Shaolong helped him up and was visibly moved as he said, “I understand your loyalty, but many things cannot be forced, let’s just see how things progress! That’s right! Did Han Chuang spend the night at Lady’s place these few days?”

Zhao Da’s expression started to look a little unnatural as he replied, “Lady did not see Marquis Han recently, but Mister Li Yuan from Chu did come once and Lady invited him to her building for a talk and he stayed there for more than 2 hours. Master Xiang! Lady is doing this only because she’s trying to make use of others to forget about you, all this time we’ve never seen her smile truly.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly livid. Li Yuan is not interested in Zhao Ya at all but just making use of her to take revenge on Ji Yanran for treating him

differently from others and this Zhao Ya has no self-respect for herself as well.

Zhao Ya exclaimed in panic, “Master Xiang! I am telling the truth.”

Xiang Shaolong replied with a straight face, “It’s very dangerous to try and stand on 2 boats at the same time. Zhao Da, from today onwards, you better put your whole heart and mind into following me. Zhao Ya is fickle and I cannot put everyone’s lives in her hands. If she betrays us again, this time there’s no chance of us turning things around again.”

Zhao Da was so startled that he knelt down and begged for forgiveness.

Xiang Shaolong pulled him up again and after talking and advising him, he went over to Teng Yi’s room to apply the medicinal sap from the ‘Love Plant’ before following Zhao Da back to Lady Ya’s residence.

Along the way, he felt more hatred the more he thought things over. Now, besides Zhao Mu, the person he hates most is that despicable and venomous Li Yuan.

He can’t help but blame Zhao Ya for being a born slut again and for having weak willpower. Since she has expressed her interest in this horse fanatic, how can she continuously flirt with other men and he can’t help but put his guard up against her.

The best way to deal with those 2 people, is naturally through his goddess Ji Yanran. Once he thought of this, his whole being was filled with energy.

## Chapter 9

### Despicable Fiend

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Xiang Shaolong arrived at Zhao Ya's main hall, which he first came when newly arrived. Those decorations and trinkets were still placed on the shelves like before, but his state of mind has changed totally.

Why didn't she invite him to that quiet and elegant little building at the garden, allowing Li Yuan that favor but treating him so shabbily. If that's the case she might as well not ask him to come so early.

Character aside, Li Yuan is indeed the dream man in a woman's bedchamber and even Ji Yanran was once impressed by his poetic skills. A pity he is of such character.

Just as he was deep in thought, Lady Ya arrived. Her ladies-in-waiting took their leave after paying their respects.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly wondering why Xiaozhao and the rest of the maids were missing. Lady Ya came to sit down next to him and said, "Mister Dong is so nice to agree to come earlier, your presence brings glamour to my humble abode."

Xiang Shaolong looked towards her. This mature beauty is glowing, a look of flirtatiousness between her eyes, her body soft and dainty and extremely alluring.

The more beautiful and enchanting she is, the angrier he felt, guessing that she must have enjoyed Li Yuan's care, that's why she has returned to her flirtatious behavior.

He said roughly, "Lady's residence is even better than the residences of those Princes and Marquis, so how can I bring more glamour."

Zhao Ya's dainty brows frowned on hearing this. How can there be anyone who takes such polite talk to be the truth and although she felt a little displeased she did not flare up so easily like she did in the past. Of course this is because right now her heart is still filled with Li Yuan's loving so she did not take it to heart as she replied, "How is the progress of your farm at the Hidden Army Valley?"

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback. An astute person like him, on seeing Zhao ya's mannerisms, already knows that Li Yuan has successfully obtained her heart, to the point that she has temporarily forgotten about 'Xiang Shaolong'. That's why she has regained her lost sophistication.

This should be something worth being happy about, at least Zhao Ya won't be harassing him now that her heart is with someone else. However, he still feels very unpleasant, and wants to hurt her and see her upset.

He suppressed this urge and asked with a smile, "Let's not talk about business today. Why does Lady want me to come earlier?" This time it was Zhao Ya's turn to become speechless.

Of course she's doing this because she has a slight interest in this horse

fanatic, but right now Li Yuan has suddenly barged into the picture and taken her heart, at least for now, so she no longer has the earlier feelings of lust.

She sent someone to pick up Xiang Shaolong earlier because deep in her heart she thirsts to be with him. This Dong Kuang has an unusual aura of being rough and at the same time filled with philosophical thoughts, overbearing yet gentle and when combined, gave her a refreshing yet exciting feel. When with him, she never knows what he will say next or if he will do anything surprising. And his attitude towards her blows hot and cold, as if he doesn't care about her but yet as if he is very interested in her. In short, with him around, she has no time to think of anything else.

This is a feeling that Li Yuan is unable to give her.

While she was enjoying herself with Li Yuan, she can't help but pretend that he is Xiang Shaolong but with this unrefined man who bears a little resemblance to Xiang Shaolong, can make her forget everything instead.

What would it be like to be intimate with him?

Once she thought of this, she shocked even herself and secretly reprimanded herself. Why is it that after seeing him, her original strong memory of Li Yuan immediately faded?

Xiang Shaolong saw her hesitant look and his fury soared and he stood up immediately. Zhao Ya was startled and lifted her head to look at him quizzically.

Xiang Shaolong said in a serious tone, “Has Lady fallen for that fellow Li Yuan, that’s why you’ve become so cold towards me?”

Zhao ya’s delicate body trembled as she exclaimed, “Ah! No!” By now she cannot guess at all how the other person managed to say out what is in her heart so accurately.

Xiang Shaolong smiled, “That’s all right, but if what Li Yuan stole was my precious horse, then I will never let him off.” He stretched lazily and with a laugh, said, “I better take a walk around the streets, I’ll come back later to join in the feast so that we need not sit in awkward silence wondering what we should talk about.”

Zhao Ya was totally lost as she stood up and pouted, “Mister Dong! Can’t you show me some consideration? Am I incomparable to a horse in your mind?” Once she said that, she knows she has made a freudian slip because won’t that mean that she is regarding herself as his horse? Xiang Shaolong looked at her nonchalantly but was secretly gloating. He turned around and started walking towards the door and said offhandedly, “That fellow kept pitting himself against me. Fine! Then let me do something and snatch Ji Yanran over, that will give him a taste of having his beloved taken by others.”

Zhao Ya wanted to run after him but stopped when she heard the 3 words Ji Yanran.

But she dare not laugh at him, because his words revealed a great confidence, making one feel that once he says something, he’ll definitely accomplish it.

By the time Xiang Shaolong disappeared outside the door, she was still thinking about the 4 words ‘beloved taken by others.

Hai! The fresh and interesting terms he used can be comparable to Xiang Shaolong. Suddenly, she knows why Li Yuan still cannot totally replace Xiang Shaolong.

Once she thought of this, her mood dimmed and she refuses to think further.

Walking alone at the streets of Handan, Xiang Shaolong thought of the wars that will occur after Xiaopan ascend the throne and can’t help but feel melancholy.

This vast land, after hundreds of years of war has finally come to a point in history that they must rejoin after being separated for so long and him as an ‘outsider’ had a hand in this change. If he did not come here, does it mean all these would not have happened? No matter how intelligent he is compared to others, this is one question that can give him a headache just thinking about it.

“Brother Dong!” He heard the call and was first at a loss for he momentarily forgot that he is supposed to be Dong Kuang. He turned around after recollecting his thoughts.

It turned out to be the Marquis of Pingshan, Han Chuang with 7 to 8 personal guards whom one can tell at a glance that they are highly skilled. All of them looked energetic and were stoutly built. Although they were not as tall as Xiang Shaolong, they still looked imposing.

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed in surprise, "I thought I was the only one who loves a stroll, I did not expect Marquis of Pingshan to enjoy this too."

Han Chuang's expression was serious and he did not reply immediately. Only when he came up next to him did he grab his arm warmly and said as they walked along, "Come! My guesthouse is just around the corner, we'll speak at my place."

Xiang Shaolong was surprised by the sudden warmth for he did not expect his attitude to suddenly turn 180 degrees from his original frosty behavior.

He can't help but follow him back to the guesthouse and even after he sat down in the hall, the 10 over swordsmen still stood around them and did not leave, making the atmosphere extremely serious. It seems like secret society bosses out for negotiation.

Han Chuang dispensed with the usual polite talk or serving drinks and said solemnly, "Damn that Li Yuan, not giving both of us any face at all. He publicly shaved off my eyebrow, how extremely hateful."

Xiang Shaolong suddenly understood. So he has been sending people to keep an eye on Zhao Ya and saw that Li Yuan has gone to look for her and stayed for a length of time which is sufficient for them to do a lot of things before leaving. He was therefore livid and is now regarding him, the other love rival, to be on his side as well. However, it can be said that Han Chuang felt that regardless of looks, status or power, he surpasses Xiang Shaolong so he does not regard him as a strong foe but as for Li Yuan, it's another matter.



From this he can see that Han Chuang is serious about Zhao Ya, to the extent that he'll like to bring her back to Han so that he can enjoy her freely at home but his dream is not shattered by Li Yuan.

He could not find anything to say in response in such short notice. Han Chuang's eyes gleamed fiercely as he said, "Why is it that Brother Dong slipped out so quickly?"

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that he must be on his way to look for Zhao Ya to ask for an explanation when he saw him walking out, therefore he changed his mind and went after him to drag him home.

He gave a cold snort and said, "What I cannot stand the most is being treated coldly and rudely. If I don't leave, what else can I do there, da.mn his grandmother!"

Han Chuang shared the same thoughts and snorted, "I, the Marquis of Pingshan, has seen many people in my life, bit I've never seen such a conceited fellow. Who does he think he is? It's all because of his sister's connection. I really don't understand why Lord Chunshen thinks so highly of him. If Li Yanyan can't give birth to a son, let's see how smug he can be."

Until now Xiang Shaolong has no idea why he was pulled here. A person like him with such a high status, there's really no need for him to find someone like him just to pour out his complaints.

Han Chuang's expression looks clouded as he said angrily, "In order not to offend the Chus and affect the grand plan for cooperation, I am already

controlling myself not to fight with him over Learned Lady Ji, but he won't even let off Zhao Ya. No wonder ever since he came, that s.lut Zhao Ya started ignoring me."

Only now did Xiang Shaolong understand how deeply Han Chuang is mesmerized by Zhao Ya so he sighed, "There are many beauties in the world, why don't Marquis just ignore her. That's why I prefer rearing horses. If you treat a horse well, they will treat you well without any other thoughts, unlike women and conniving people who are hard to keep."

Han Chuang was silent for a moment before he actually laughed and slapped his shoulder, saying, "It's really interested talking to you, but I must get back at him. Li Yuan was such a brag, I'd like to see how formidable his sword skills are."

Xiang Shaolong was startled and exclaimed, "Marquis, you're not thinking of personally dueling tomorrow?"

The corners of Han Chuang's lips curved up into a sinister smile, his eyes turning icy as he lowered his voice and said, "Why would I do such a silly thing. I've already made preparations, even if Li Yuan is taught a lesson, he won't be able to know that I was behind it."

Xiang Shaolong knows that people like him who use underhand methods will never reveal all the details, and seeing that he is willing to tell what his plans are, it's obvious that he's already regarding him as one of them. He pretended to pander to him and said, "People who offend you are really fools."

Han Chuang suddenly leaned back against the chair and said feebly, “We have long given up on the Chus. All along, the three of us have been fighting hard against Qin and they are always tripping us up from the back. Who can guarantee that Li Yuan won’t inform the Qins of our intention to cooperate and by that time if the Qins decide to strike first, the first to be attacked will be my country. Hai! I really do not understand why the King of Zhao would pander to him so much?”

He looked at him and asked, “Does Brother Dong know why King Xiaocheng has suddenly become so cold towards you and did not even invite you to the feast last night?”

Xiang Shaolong pretended to look angry and nodded his head, “Isn’t it all because of that fellow Li Yuan!”

Han Chuang actually slapped his back like they’re old friends and said, “If this place is not for you, there will always be other places who will welcome you. Our doors will always be opened to welcome Mister Dong. If you want to deal with Li Yuan, I can be your back-up.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing, for this is his aim in trying to pull him to his side, which is to make use of him to deal with Li Yuan. He pretended to be grateful and said, “I will remember Marquis’s words.”

Han Chuang sulked, “I think Yanran will ultimately fall into his hands. If we can snatch this beauty from his hands, it will make him feel even worse than killing him.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed, “Learned Lady Ji is not that easy to win, I don’t think that Li Yuan will succeed.”

Han Chuang smiled sinisterly, “If you want to make a woman yield, there are a lot of ways. For example letting her try a little aphrodisiac, that will make sure she throws herself at you. It’s definitely not easy to find a chance to be along with Ji Yanran but she seems to be impressed with Brother Dong’s skills with rearing horses, so maybe... heh! Do you understand my meaning!”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly livid, thinking that he is really despicable for this would not only harm Ji Yanran but also himself. Of course! That is only if he is the real Dong Kuang.

A learned lady like Ji Yanran who has the respect and admiration of everyone in the world, if anyone were to do such a beastly thing to her, then won’t he end up being the enemy of everyone? It’ll be a surprise if Han Chuang is willing to take him in at that time.

Just looking at the plan of making use of him to kill others, he can see how evil hearted this Han Chuang is.

Now he’s beginning to understand why the 6 states will ultimately be destroyed by Qin. With a person like Han Chuang in an important official position, representing his country to come to Handan to have the secret discussion to deal with Qin, instead of tending to business, he is spending his efforts on his jealousy.

For now he has seen that the 4 states Han, Wei, Zhao and Chu are all filled

with manipulative people and cannot be used by great men like Li Mu, Lian Po and Lord Xinling. He wonders how the situation is like in Yan and Qi.

Han Chuang gave a hand signal and someone immediately sent in a small bottle. Han Chuang stuffed it into Xiang Shaolong's hands and said with the most sincere expression, "I am counting on Mister to help me get my back at him. Women are very strange, no matter how fiercely they protect their chastity, but once you get her body, most will become very meek towards you. Ji Yanran is a woman so she is no exception either! Heh! I'm really envious of Brother Dong!"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly cursing but he asked about the instructions to use the thing and stuffed the small bottle into his clothes and said, "I still have to see what the situation is like. Hai! I'm really not that interested in women. How can women be compared to horses?"

Han Chuang persuaded him again and after saying a lot of good words, went with him to Lady Ya's residence for the feast.

Xiang Shaolong waited for Han Chuang to enter the residence first. He strolled outside for a while and strutted into the residence slightly later.

The square outside the main building was filled with carriages. After Zhao Da brought him into the residence, he said quietly, "After you left just now, Lady sat there looking very miserable for a long time. She even refused to see Guo Kai when he came. Master Dong is indeed good."

Xiang Shaolong knows that he still has not given up hope that he will

reconcile with Zhao Ya but how can spilt milk be recollected.

The feast is being held at an elegant looking square room in the side of the main building. The layout is the same as what the Guo family used the other night, a huge round table placed at the center of the hall with more than 10 seats around it.

All those who attended the feast at the Guo family were here, including that pretty Miss Guo.

Xiang Shaolong thought that after that night, Guo Xiu'er would refuse to see Li Yuan but now it seems that she's behaving as if nothing is wrong.

Besides these people, there are 4 more persons.

The first is of course Ji Yanran, as well as Zhao Zhi and Guo Kai and a 40 odd year old man who was dressed splendidly with an imposing aura. However his eyes kept flitting around, giving one the feeling that he is someone who likes to plot.

It was not yet time to start the feast so the 8 folding doors at the side of the hall were all opened and they could all see the huge garden outside filled with flowers and trees, with a dozen odd lanterns hanging from the branches, illuminating the whole garden into a colorful array, giving it a dreamy feel.

Xiang Shaolong was the last guest to arrive and most of the people are already in the garden admiring the lanterns leaving only Zhao Mu, Guo

Zhong, Le Cheng, Zhao Ba and that anonymous man talking in the hall.

Zhao Mu saw Xiang Shaolong and chortled, “Why is Mister Dong late, I must punish you later and make you drink up 3 cups of wine. Come! Meet Mister Ji Zhong.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled, so this is the special envoy representing Lord Dongzhou to unify the 6 states to deal with Qin, and he hurriedly rushed over.

Ji Zhong places a lot of importance on protocol so Xiang Shaolong had to pay his respects according to court customs and after some polite words, Ji Zhong may seem courteous and respectful but it was obvious that he pays no heed at all to someone who rears horses. He turned back to the topic they were discussing earlier, talking about how useless King Zhuangxiang of Qin is to place such importance on Lu Buwei, and about how Qin will definitely suffer from internal strife.

Xiang Shaolong is not in the mood to listen to him at all and after excusing himself, he walked towards the garden. He had just stepped into the garden when 3 pairs of pretty eyes flitted towards him.

Ji Yanran’s pretty eyes can’t help but light up on seeing him; Zhao Ya turned her head away after staring at him angrily, obviously still upset; Zhao Zhi has been waiting for his appearance all along and her pretty face beamed as she said happily, “Mister Dong come quickly, we were just discussing a very interesting question!”

Xiang Shaolong looked over and saw that everyone was gathered around the stone bridge at the center of the garden, a clear stream flowing windingly below it and towards a lotus pond a slight distance away where a strange rock was placed right in the middle and the whole layout looked extremely interesting. From this one can see that besides being a s.lut, Zhao Ya is also a woman that has aspirations.

Ji Yanran was leaning over the bridge in a relaxed manner while Li Yuan who was next to her was pointing at the various fishes swimming beneath, trying to get into her good books.

Guo Xiu'er and Zhao Zhi were the most familiar, sitting together on a large, smooth rock a short distance away and they looked like they were admiring this pretty garden filled with lanterns. The former is eyeing him right now.

Han Chuang and Guo Kai were accompanying Zhao Ya and standing on the middle of the bridge, behind Ji Yanran and Li Yuan.

Xiang Shaolong walked towards the stone bridge and first greeted Guo xiu'er and Zhao Zhi. Zhao Zhi forced herself to return the greeting while Guo Xiu'er gave him an additional sweet smile.

Although Xiang Shaolong's heart was stirred, he knows that he must never touch this girl for after all the Wu family and the Guo family are arch enemies.

When he stepped up to the stone bridge, Ji Yanran ignored Li Yuan and turned around, saying with a smile, "Mister Dong! We were just discussing



about the meaning of life and death, I wonder what your thoughts on this are?”

Xiang Shaolong knows that this pretty lady loves a discussion, from ruling a country to things like this, whether life has any meaning. And this is an era where everyone is fighting for a chance to speak and where ideologies are expanding like an explosion.

The mood for such idle discussions are mostly found in the noble and scholarly circles, just like Confucius and his peers not too long ago who loved to talk about life and philosophy all day long. A pity that he’s not too knowledgeable in this area so although he knows that Ji Yanran is giving him a chance to show off so that he can smoothly start his pursuit of her, there is nothing he could do. He replied with a wry smile, “I’m just an unrefined man, how would I understand such profound ideologies?”

Ji Yanran thought that he was pretending to be modest before expounding his ideas but before she had a chance to reply, Li Yuan interrupted, “A pity that Mister Zou is not here, otherwise he will certainly give a very remarkable view. Heh! Why don’t we seek Mister Dong’s advice on rearing horses!”

Anyone with a brain would know that he was putting Xiang Shaolong down, implying that besides horses, he knows nothing else. And in this era, rearing horses is considered a lowly occupation so he was deliberately jabbing at Xiang Shaolong’s status.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly furious but he was even more worried that he’ll press on to ask questions about horses. Although he had crammed some

knowledge in this area, his expertise is still very limited. He pretended to be nonchalant and said, "I'm sure you've come out with a conclusion after discussing for so long, why not enlighten me on this."

Guo Kai, the conniving Confucian scholar said, "I still believe in Confucius's words 'if you cannot serve men, how can you serve spirits', so I might as well not think about anything beyond life and death."

Zhao Ya was apparently in high spirits as she laughed, "Scholar Guo is really wily, only knowing how to avoid and refusing to face this most important lesson in life."

Li Yuan said proudly, "Whatever we do, there must be a goal so why do we only choose to ignore the question of our existence. Since heaven has given us precious life, we should burn brightly and warmly just like the colorful lanterns hanging high on the trees, only then will our lives not be lived in vain."

Xiang Shaolong has to admit that there is some truth and imagination behind this person's words. He looked at the ladies around, Zhao Ya's eyes revealed a look of intoxication, Ji Yanran was concentrating very hard on his words too while Zhao Zhi and Guo Xiu'er paused in their private talk to listen intently.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that this doesn't look well so after searching through his mind, he said, "What Brother Li said is just an attitude towards life, but it's not a conclusion about the meaning of life and death." Guo Kai and Han Chuang both revealed a look of surprise for they did not expect this unrefined man's mind and observation skills would be so intricate.

Li Yuan chortled and said, “Well said Mister Dong, but just like what Zhuang Zi said, ‘when man take what is small and try to fill up what is great, they will end up confused and will not achieve their end’. As long as we’re being restricted within life and death, we can never find the answer about life and death, just like the snake in summer will not know what is the snow and ice of winter. So the only thing we can do is to have an attitude to achieve something so that we will not waste our short lives.’ He spoke flowingly, melodiously and with such feelings that he really has the charisma of a debater that will stun others into admiration. No wonder even Ji Yanran is looking at him differently. For the moment Xiang Shaolong was speechless.

Li Yuan saw his expression and was secretly laughing. There’s no way he will let him off so he pretended to be humble and sought his opinion, “And what is Mister Dong’s attitude towards life?”

Of course Xiang Shaolong can randomly find some words to say but if he wants make it sound even more impressively than this person, there’s no way he could even if he wanted to.

Han Chuang is now on the same side as him so he helped ease the situation by saying, “Tonight’s discussion is really unique and interesting, why don’t we pause for now and continue during the feast!” Zhao Ya said unhappily, “It was such an exciting discussion yet you’re in such a hurry to start the feast. Zhao Ya still wants to hear more of Mister Li’s excellent theories!”

Ji Yanran said gently, “We haven’t given Mister Dong the chance to speak?”

Looking at Ji Yanran’s expectant eyes, he remembered his mission to pursue

her publicly so how can he make himself look so useless? Just as he was lamenting, he suddenly had an idea and remembered that he once heard of a story in his era, and maybe he can use it to reflect the situation now. He walked to the bridge and came next to Ji Yanran. He first looked deeply into her eyes before revealing his white and perfect teeth to Zhao Ya in a slight smile before he turned around and placed both his hands on the side of the bridge, lifting his head to look at the night sky. The moon up in the sky was pure and bright, round and so far away.

Everyone knows that he has something to say but they have no idea what kind of insight he could give that can be better than Li Yuan's so they all breathed steadily and quietly, getting ready to concentrate on his words.

The corners of Li Yuan's mouth curved up into a slight sniggering smile.

Ji Yanran closed her beautiful eyes, she is confident that Xiang Shaolong will certainly say something philosophical that will make one contemplate over. To her, nothing is more interesting than contemplating over life's questions and this is also the reason why she became good friends with Zou Yan. She fell in love with Xiang Shaolong because his words are refreshing and exceptional, different from the others.

Xiang Shaolong's hoarse voice said slowly, "A tourist was walking in the desert, when suddenly a pack of hungry wolves appeared behind him, running after him so that they could feast on him."

Everyone was alarmed but at the same time they felt a great interest for they did not expect him to suddenly tell a story. Just like how Zhuang Zi likes to

use fables to portray his thoughts.

Xiang Shaolong's voice reverberated through the quiet night, giving it an inexplicable feeling of mystery and power, especially when the topic is about the unfathomable question of life and death.

He continued in a very slow tempo, "He was startled and started running madly, fighting on for his life."

Guo Xiu'er exclaimed 'Ah' and said, "How can he run faster than hungry wolves in the desert, he will certainly die!"

The rest of them smiled on hearing that but did not say anything because they all want to continue listening, even Li Yuan was no exception. But when he saw how pretty Ji Yanran looked with her eyes closed, looking so obedient and concentrated, he can't help but feel jealousy burn in him.

Xiang Shaolong smiled and said, "No need to panic! Just as the hungry wolves were about to catch up with him, he saw a well in front which he has no idea how deep it could be and jumped in without a thought."

Zhao Ya heaved a sigh of relief and asked, "The well is certainly filled with water, right?"

Xiang Shaolong looked at the little stream below him and shook his head, "Not only is it dry, there's also a lot of poisonous snakes and on seeing that there's food being delivered right to their door, they all raised their heads and hissed, waiting in anticipation."

This time it was Ji Yanran's turn to exclaim 'ah!' as she opened her pretty eyes and turned her dainty body around to look at him and ask, "What should he do? Why don't he turn back and fight with the hungry wolves for poisonous snakes are more frightening than wolves." Han Chuang laughed, "Women are all afraid of snakes and Miss Ji is no exception."

Xiang Shaolong looked at Ji Yanran and said gently, "In his panic, he started grabbing around for something that might save his life and unexpectedly, heaven is fulfilling his wish and he grabbed a small tree that was growing horizontally between the well so he was suspended in midair." Everyone remained quiet for they knew there will be more to the story.

Zhao Ya's eyes lit up for in this instance, her heart only sees this man who is even more special and unfathomable than Li Yuan.

Xianf Shaolong continued, "Therefore the hungry wolves are above and the poisonous snakes are below. Although that person is in a dire situation where he can neither advance nor retreat but at the moment at least, he is safe."

Everyone started to have some understanding. What Xiang Shaolong said is the reflection of life for when between life and death, who would not be in the situation whereby he cannot advance or retreat?

He continued, "Just as he was heaving a sigh of relief, he heard a strange noise. He turned towards where the noise was coming from in fear and was shocked to see a large number of rats chewing on the roots of the tree with their sharp teeth. This life saving tree has not much time left." Guo Xiu'er and Zhao Zhi both cried out at the same time.

Xiang Shaolong looked deeply into Ji Yanran's eyes, as if he's telling this story only to her, "Just at this instant between life and death, he saw in front of his eyes on a leaf, a drop of honey. Therefore he forgot about the hungry wolves above, the poisonous snakes below and the small tree that was almost gnawed in half by the rats but closed his eyes and extended his tongue, totally concentrated on tasting that drop of honey."

The bridge was so still that there was no noise at all except for the faint rush of the stream flowing past.

Xiang Shaolong stretched lazily and said, "And to me, that drop of honey is the meaning to life!"

No one spoke for even people like Guo Kai and Han Chuang who only knows how to hanker after wealth and fame, had their worries stirred up and they could relate with him.

Li Yuan saw that everyone was touched by Xiang Shaolong's extremely deep thoughts on this matter and was feeling upset so he broke the silence and asked, "Where did this fable come from?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled and said, "The horses told me!" He then chortled and said, "I'm hungry!"

## Chapter 10

### A drop of honey

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Ji Yanran personally lifted the wine flask and stood up, coming to kneel in front of Xiang Shaolong. There's no need for her to pretend, for the look of admiration is naturally revealed in her eyes as she said gently, "Yanran have just heard the most moving fable in my entire life and there's no way I can repay you, except to make use of this fine wine to thank Mister Dong." With a graceful and breath-stopping pose, she poured the wine into Xiang Shaolong's cup.

Everyone was astounded.

Zhao Mu said in bewilderment, "What kind of fabulous fable did Mister Dong said, to make our Learned Lady Ji bow down and serve him wine personally?"

Ji Zhong revealed a look of surprise.

Li Yuan's face darkened, a look of hatred and jealousy in his eyes that he cannot hide.

Zhao Ya looked intoxicated as she repeated the story.

Those who have not heard were all impressed.

Ji Yanran went back to her seat and lifted her cup, "Ji Yanran offers Mister



Dong a toast.”

Although Han Chuang is secretly feeling extremely jealous, he was also happy that the hateful Li Yuan has been given a blow so he joined in and said, “Let everyone have a toast!”

Everyone toasted one another and although Li Yuan was extremely unwilling, he had no choice but force himself to drink this bitter wine.

Xiang Shaolong looked closely at the ladies. Ji Yanran obviously cannot hide the overflowing love that he has incited whereas Zhao Ya kept making eyes at him, trying to convey her thoughts with her eyes. Even Zhao Zhi who was still angry with him changed her attitude towards him, sneaking peeks at him frequently. Most surprisingly is that Guo Xiu’er was also looking at him with admiration. He was secretly counting his lucky stars. If not for the fact that he can make use of other people’s intellect, he’ll certainly make a fool of himself tonight, and it definitely won’t be this outcome, where he stuck 4 birds with a stone.

Ji Zhong said, “I didn’t expect Mister Dong to have heard such impressive and moving fable, this is really incredible.” He turned to Li Yuan and said, “Mister Li has such intelligence, you’ll definitely have your views about this.”

His words are meant to put down Xiang Shaolong subtly while obviously complimenting Li Yuan and from this one can see that this person will stoop to all means just to achieve his goals. To him, Li Yuan, who can influence the King of Chu, is naturally more important than Xiang Shaolong.

Han Chuang chortled and interrupted, “That was a fable that Mister Dong inferred from the horses, but I do have another view. If everyone in our 6 states forget ourselves in that drop of honey which can only offer us an instant of sweetness and join forces to deal with the Qins who are like the tigers and wolves, we will definitely be able to extricate ourselves from danger.”

These words are obviously meant for the Chus, because time and again they have betrayed the other united states just because the Qins gave them some benefits and in the end they lost their own troops as well.

Zhao Mu and the rest were secretly gloating as they look at Li Yuan’s expression change slightly.

With Ji Yanran around, Li Yuan refuses to make himself look bad so he quickly smoothened his expression and changed the topic.

Xiang Shaolong knows that the more one talks, the more likely mistakes are made so he buried himself with food and drinks. He ignored Li Yuan who was trying to get on Ji Yanran’s good grace, and once in a while would engage Zhao Ya and the other ladies, behaving like a suave flirt. If not for the fact that he was put down earlier by Xiang Shaolong, he’ll definitely be a woman’s ideal lover.

However Ji Yanran is not in the mood to bother about him, constantly looking at Xiang Shaolong instead, wishing that she can throw herself into his arms immediately.

The hostess, Zhao Ya, who was seated next to Li Yuan, was forced to down 3 cups of wine and her pretty face started turning an alluring red. She gave a flirtatious laugh and asked, "Have you not forced enough drinks on me today yet?"

Everyone was startled and looked at the two of them.

Zhao Ya knew that she has let the cat out of the bag and quickly lowered her head.

Li Yuan was feeling extremely embarrassed. He came to look for Zhao Ya secretly today partly because he wanted to put Xiang Shaolong down but the main reason is that he is feeling lusty. Although Zhao Ya does not have Ji Yanran's unique grace, she is still a rare beauty and it's a waste to give up this chance. He just did not expect Zhao Ya to leak out this information during the feast.

He coughed dryly and said, "Didn't we agree last night we'll have a wager on who can hold their drinks better?"

Zhao Ya took a glance at Xiang Shaolong only to see him staring at the fine wine in his cup, as if he doesn't mind at all. She felt a little relieved but at the same time felt a tinge of regret, hating herself for being unable to withstand Li Yuan's lure.

Besides Xiang Shaolong, Li Yuan is the only man after him who could make her heart flutter and he even said he can take her away from this sad place to go to faraway Chu. But she has no idea why, this horse fanatic with the

strange ideas in front of her, the way he moves and speaks, a person with a mixture of intelligence, coarseness and rashness, is make her feel more excitement than the more handsome Li Yuan. She is struggling, caught between the desire to fight back and to give in, feeling both pain and happiness.

Ji Yanran took a look at Xiang Shaolong and told Li Yuan indifferently, "This is what's called, famous men since ancient times have too much love to share!"

Li Yuan was secretly cursing himself and before he had the chance to explain, Zhao Ya lifted her pretty face and said with a smile, Miss Yanran is mistaken. Mister Li only came to discuss poems with Zhao Ya, and only drank a little wine to liven the mood!"

Obviously Guo Xiu'er has an interest in poetry so she asked Xiang Shaolong, who is now a great philosopher in her heart, "What does Mister Dong think about poems?"

Once she said that, everyone's attention turned towards Xiang Shaolong.

Guo Zhong was secretly feeling alarmed, has his beloved daughter taken a liking to this unrefined man? Zhao Zhi remembered Xiang Shaolong's horrible handwriting and was secretly sighing.

Ji Yanran and Zhao Ya were energized as they waited excitedly for this person to say something marvelous.

The odes passed down since ancient times, after many modifications by

Confucius and his disciples, totaled more than 300.

These odes, in this era, have a very practical value, especially amongst the nobility. It has become a part of life and if one cannot recite some odes during social activities, he will be looked down upon. There's even a form of welcome address that uses purely odes that is called 'Composing a Poem' and the poem used in reply is called 'Reply Poem'. Therefore those who are not familiar with odes will embarrass themselves easily, like the saying 'One who does not learn odes, will have no words to reply'.

Xiang Shaolong is considered lucky but his luck has apparently run out by now. He's finally come face to face with this unsolvable problem.

Odes are not only a decorative façade and a tool to express one's upbringing and cultivation but 'discussing odes' is also a popular activity of this era. For example the ode 'Charming smile, enchanting eyes, plain background for colors' can generally mean a beautiful woman but can also mean the application of make-up \*. Zigong therefore asked Confucius and he later added, "A painting will have to be done on a plain white background.' Because of this he gained Confucius's admiration, saying that he is qualified enough to discuss odes.

(\*ode from the analects of Confucius)

Therefore, discussion of odes is a very common affair during feasts so Guo Xiu'er was not deliberately making things difficult for this man who has garnered her interest.

Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to cry for help but he said calmly, "I am after all an unrefined person, how can I be qualified to talk about insights?" Guo Xiu'er did not expect this exceptional man to give her such a disappointing answer so she lowered her pretty head and spoke no more.

Ji Yanran had a look of bewilderment.

To her, having Xiang Shaolong woo her openly is a very interesting game for it can allow her to understand more about her beloved ability. She did not expect him to reveal his sharp wit only to shrink back again, and now she cannot admire his talent. She did not expect Xiang Shaolong to be even worse than a simpleton in this aspect.

Ji Zhong revealed a look of despise and he is even surer that Xiang Shaolong must have stolen the fable earlier from someone else and used it as his own.

Guo Kai and Han Chuang revealed a look of surprise, for Dong Kuang's father and grandfather used to be court officials, so how can Dong Kuang know nothing about poems at all? Whereas Zhao Mu guessed that he did not want to show off under such circumstances so he chortled and asked Zhao Ya, "I wonder what is the topic that Mister Li and Lady discussed today?"

Li Yuan saw that Xiang Shaolong had been embarrassed and was secretly ecstatic as he replied, "I was discussing with lady the relationship between poems and joy. As the saying goes 'The mind thrive with the Odes, Propriety is established through rites, The ending is accomplished through music' so I gave Lady the music I composed for her input and luckily she did not make fun of it."

Most interactions between the nobility and the officials cannot escape from poetry and music so Li Yuan is making use of this to show Ji Yanran that there is nothing else going on between him and Zhao Ya.

Zhao Zhi who has been silent all this while spoke up, “Mister Dong seems to hold no regards for music and poems at all!”

Xiang Shaolong almost felt like strangling her. Naturally she was secretly being sarcastic to him for his rude behavior towards her last night and at the same time jealous that Ji Yanran has expressed a liking for him so she was trying to put him down.

Li Yuan was overjoyed on hearing this and said with a laugh, “At least Mister Dong is happy being with horses, so of course he need not bother about anything else.”

Ji Zhong has always been aware of his own status and he had no choice but to be seated together at the same feast with a unrefined horse trader so he was already feeling unhappy. However he is a very deep person who will not reveal his thoughts. This time he made use of the opportunity to pander to Li Yuan and said, “Mister Dong is famed for rearing horses while Mister Li is well versed in poetry and music, so to each his own.”

Xiang Shaolong had no intention of being a busybody but once he heard that, fury just rose up within him and he said, “Please forgive an unrefined person like me for not understanding, among the 7 states, the Qins can be considered the worse in terms of popularity of philosophical discussions and importance of rites and music, but why is it they are the only one who can be

the biggest threat to our 6 states?”

Once he said that, everyone’s expression changed, and they were speechless. Because this is a fact that cannot be debated.

Xiang Shaolong said icily, “Some people may look down on horse traders like me, and deride me for not understanding odes, but I can make the country and home strong with my horses and fight against external enemies. The Qins are strong because they place more importance in military contributions, all other matters are put aside.”

Everyone knows that he is angry and they just listened quietly.

Xiang Shaolong continued, “As a part of life, poetry and music is good in molding a person’s temperament and beautifying things. But with such a situation now, the more important thing is a rich country and strong soldiers. Food and clothing is more basic than honor or disgrace. If one cannot even protect the country, why bother talking about poetry and songs. In the past King Goujian of Yue slept on sticks and ate gall and persevered, so he was finally able to take revenge. After I came to Handan, I find that everyone is engrossed in eating, drinking and having fun. With such environment, no matter how much you support poetry and music, sooner or later you will become slaves of a fallen country.”

The one who felt the worse was Zhao Zhi, to be reprimanded in her face by him so she lowered her pretty face quietly.

Li Yuan and Han Chuang’s expression became uneasy for they are indeed



more engrossed in play and had totally ignored the grand plan of dealing with the Qins.

Zhao Mu remembered that 'he' grew up in the wilderness mountainous areas so he did not feel at all bewildered, even secretly thinking that when he becomes the King of Zhao in future, he must give more important duties to this practical person.

The feelings of the other 3 ladies were not as direct for in this world where men are leaders, it is naturally the duty of men to protect the country. Instead they find him to be extraordinary for it seems that everyone else is intoxicated but he is the only sober person.

Ji Zhong smiled coldly and said, "Who will know who the last one standing is until the very end?"

Xiang Shaolong is already feeling very irritated with this person that Lord Dongzhou had sent. He eyes flashed icily as he stared at him and said, "People say that a normal person will only think of today's matters, a fool will only remember yesterday's matters and only the intelligent will have a open mind and think about tomorrow, or even possible events that will happen one year or ten years later and start making plans today. If one has to wait until a winner is found which by then will be too late for regrets, he might as well go home now and hug his woman and get as much sleep as possible."

Ji zhong's expression changed as he said angrily, "What does Mister Dong mean by those words? Who does not plan for the future, or are you the only intelligent one?"

Zhao Ya tried to play the peacemaker but Xiang Shaolong raised his hand to stop her. He smiled calmly and said, “Mister Ji thinks too much. I am only stating facts, so please do not think that I was pinpointing at anyone. I am a straightforward person and now I’m sharing weal and woe with everyone here so I hope I can offer my help to protect the country and her peoples. But look what kind of reception I received. Anyone with eyes will know who will be the last one standing. This is not a time for argument, but a time to cast aside our preconceptions for only by knowing oneself and one’s enemy, will we be able to stand a chance at fighting Qin.”

Guo Kai and Le Cheng exchanged looks, finally understanding the reason for his anger, for he is blaming the King of Zhao for ignoring him because of Li Yuan.

Zhao Ba exclaimed “Excellent!” and turned towards Ji Zhong, saying “Horse Fanatic Dong is a straight forward person who speaks his mind and I like that. Mister Ji please do not blame him, his words are a reprimand for everyone at this table, including me. But his lecture does indeed set a person thinking.”

How can Li Yuan be appeased, so he said with an icy smile, “Since that’s the case, Mister Dong can jolly well not attend such a merry making feast, so why is he saying one thing, but doing another thing altogether?”

Xiang Shaolong smiled slightly and replied, “Mister Li is mistaken. A feast is a normal social activity, and the Qins have never banned feasts. I’m just making use of the topic being discussed to point out that some people are abandoning and ignoring the most important matters and only cares about having fun, or because of their own selfish gains, are doing things that will

only harm others but benefit themselves.”

He stared at him, lifted his arms and tugged at his collar, pulling down his top to reveal his bandaged shoulders and asked nonchalantly, “Can Mister Li tell me, who caused these sword injuries?”

Ji Yanran exclaimed ‘Ah’ and looked towards Li Yuan.

Li Yuan was caught off guard and was stunned, unable to speak.

It was only now that the others understand that these two person’s enmity is so deep to the extent that weapons are now being used.

Xiang Shaolong rearranged his clothes and said with a smile, “Naturally Mister Li would not know who did this and anyway I can’t be bothered with such lowdown people who use despicable means. I just want to prove to everyone here that I am not shooting people down without a reason.”

Xiang Shaolong’s word were meat to establish his image of a straightforward and open person and at the same time attacking Li Yuan so that this person would not dare to strike him again. Otherwise it’ll be a big problem if he wants to distance himself from the attack.

Li Yuan’s expression now looked as horrendous as anyone can imagine.

Zhao Mu said, “Mister Dong can relate your attack in detail to General Le, he’ll definitely help to give you justice.”

Xiang Shaolong guffawed in reply, "Such insignificant matters, why talk about it. Come, let me offer a toast to Mister Ji and Mister Li to thank them for listening to the complaints of an uncouth man like me."

Everyone lifted their cups so Ji and Li had no choice but to lift their cups and drink up as well.

They had just put down their cups when Zhao Zhi offered a toast to Xiang Shaolong, "I was ignorant and caused Mister Dong to be so angry, let me make use of this wine to offer my apologies."

Zhao Zhi has always been known for being stubborn and for those who know her well, this is the first time they see her being so meek.

Xiang Shaolong said with a smile after he drank up, "It's my fault, how can it be blamed on Miss Zhi."

Ji Yanran's eyes were exceptionally bright as she offered a toast to him, "Not only are Mister Dong's words surprising, but thought provoking as well. You will definitely have a great future."

What followed were toasts being offered to one another and the atmosphere returned to normal, at least it seems so on the surface.

Li Yuan was constantly disadvantaged tonight and Xiang Shaolong gained all the upper hand so he was anxiously talking to Ji Yanran who was sitting beside him, hoping to get back into her good grace. A pity that Ji Yanran now knows that he is so despicable as to send men to ambush Xiang Shaolong and

she wished she could kill him instead. Therefore she only gave him a few polite but icy replies.

Han Chuang who was seated beside Xiang Shaolong tapped him twice under the table to express his admiration. Zhao Mu gave him a look, to show that he is satisfied with his performance.

Guo Kai looks like he's deep in thought, obviously because Xiang Shaolong is not as simple as he thought, so he's now reevaluating him. Zhao Ya became quiet.

She too did not expect Li Yuian to have such deep enmity with this Dong Kuang to the extent that he'd send killers. She is an intelligent person so she guessed that this is because of jealousy, and he came to pander to her maybe because he had the intention of getting back at Dong Kuang. Although up to this point of time she has nothing to do with Dong Kuang at all, she was being made used of by Li Yuan. Once she thought of that, she can't help but feel a little regret.

She saw Xiang Shaolong stand up and looked at him in surprise.

Xiang Shaolong bowed suavely and said, "I thank Lady for this unique lantern feast, but I am used to sleeping early so I'll have to make a move first."

Everyone tried to make him stay, of course with the exception of Ji Zhong and Li Yuan.

Xiang Shaolong bowed again and retreated out of his seat.

Zhao Ba stood up and said, "The sword discussion meeting tomorrow, Brother Dong please remember to come on time."

Xiang Shaolong looked at Ji Yanran who was looking at him with a heated expression and asked, "Will Miss be gracing the sword discussion meeting with your presence?"

Ji yanran replied gently, "Since Mister Dong will be attending, how can Yanran not be there."

Once she said this, Li Yuan was immediately fuming while the other men all looked astonished.

Xiang Shaolong bid his farewell to them one by one and when it came to Guo Xiu'er's turn, this dainty lady exclaimed, "Xiu'er wants to go tomorrow to learn more as well."

Xiang Shaolong and Guo Zhong's brows both furrowed deeply at the same time on hearing that.

As for Zhao Zhi, he deliberately tried not to look directly at her but just bowed hurriedly and turned towards the main door.

The sounds of clothes and trinkets rustling were heard coming after him and Zhao Ya rushed up to his side and said, "Let me send you off!"

Xiang Shaolong knows that he won't be able to reject her so he said graciously, "Lady is too polite!"

Zhao Ya accompanied him quietly along the long corridors in the residence. Since she is not talking, naturally Xiang Shaolong would not start a conversation as well.

Zhao Ya suddenly tugged at his sleeve gently and stopped walking.

Xiang Shaolong halted in surprise and lowered his head to look at her.

Zhao Ya looked extremely lost, her pretty eyes alluringly sad as she lifted her pretty face to look closely at his face.

Xiang Shaolong felt goose bumps rising under such scrutiny so he asked in puzzlement, "Lady, what's wrong!" Zhao Ya shook her head slightly and said dejectedly, "I can't help but keep thinking of you as another person, only when I look closer did I realize that I was wrong."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled and he took the opportunity to change the topic and said coldly, "I don't think I have much similarity with Li Yuan! But luckily this is so."

Zhao Ya still held on to his sleeve as she lowered her head dejectedly and said, "Mister Dong please do not laugh at me, Zhao Ya is just that pitiful girl who is constantly looking for that drop of honey! Why is Mister always treating me so cruelly?"

Xiang Shaolong's fury rose as he secretly thought that since she has found him, that drop of honey, then why is she so hard hearted as to betray him. He replied with a laugh, "Your two drops of honey are in the great hall, please

forgive me for not being able to stay.” With a wave of his hand he dislodged her hold and walked away.

Zhao Ya looked as he disappeared behind the door and felt as if the world has suddenly lost its color. Right at this time, she knows that after Xiang Shaolong, this is the first time she has really fallen for another man but immediately she was grumbling in her heart, ‘Who cares who you are? Am I, Zhao Ya, one who can be rejected by you so easily.’

She stomped her feet and returned to the hall.

Xiang Shaolong walked out of the residence and the night breeze blew in his face and he was immediately energized.

He was really furious earlier. Those idiots from the 6 states only know how to fight amongst themselves but have no idea that big trouble is almost upon them.

At the same time he was in a dilemma. Although he is now the enemy of the 6 states, yet he still has some feelings for Handan, making him worry about the fate of this ancient city.

Then he thought of his own problem. What had seemed so easy originally, has not become extremely complicated. With the situation now, if he wants to capture Zhao Mu alive and send him back to Xianyang is quite impossible. And if he has to kill Le Cheng, this general who wields the military power of Handan, that would be even more difficult than ascending heaven. The strong confidence he had when he first came is starting to waver.



An extra day in Handan will mean an extra day of danger. The biggest problem is of course because the important officials and famed generals of the other 5 states are concentrated here, the security and vigilance in Handan has risen greatly. Capturing Zhao Mu is not difficult, but to send him away will be fraught with difficulties.

Once he thought of this, he can't help but heave a great sigh.

Sounds of hoof beats was heard coming nearer, and slowing down as it neared.

Xiang Shaolong had already guessed who has come after him so he said without even turning his head, "How do you do, Miss Zhi!"

Zhao zhi's crisp voice immediately replied, "How did you know it was me?"

Xiang Shaolong turned his head sideways to look at the gallant Zhao Zhi astride her horse and said with a smile, "Other than Zhao Zhi, who else would dare to come and meet my bad temper alone."

Zhao Zhi was originally looking down and staring at him but when she heard that she lifted her pretty face to look at the night sky above the streets of Handan and said with a pout, "Wrong guess! Zhao Zhi has no time to bother with people like you."

Xiang Shaolong knows that she has already surrendered half her heart to him but she just cannot admit to it. However his heart can only contain Ji Yanran now, besides Zhao Zhi is Jing Jun's beloved so there's no way he can snatch

someone's love away. There's really no way he can do this to his own brother. How awkward would it be between him and Jing Jun in future then? The way he forced her to leave last night, he didn't feel too good about it either.

The Zhao Zhi at this instant is especially alluring.

He chortled and asked, "Then why do you have the leisure to accompany me on my night tour of Handan?"

Right at this time a group of soldiers rode over in the quiet street, reminding them of the war which has not stopped in hundreds of years and which can still start at any time. Those patrol soldiers saw Zhao Zhi and greeted her respectfully.

Zhao Zhi nudged her horse forward to walk alongside Xiang Shaolong and said nonchalantly, "Don't you think you've offended everyone tonight?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Why does it matter, didn't your people Meng Ke said 'They may be thousands of people against me, but I will go forward'.

\*Meng Ke - Mencius

Zhao Zhi looked down in surprise, "Why would Meng Ke be ours?"

Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to slap himself. Up to this point of time he still regarded himself as an outsider so he said with embarrassment, "No real meaning to that, just a slip of the tongue!"

Zhao Zhi stared at him with unsure suspicion and surprise and took some time before she uttered softly, “Get up my horse!”

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, “Where to?”

Zhao Zhi asked icily, “Afraid?”

Xiang Shaolong chortled, “Sharing a horse like that, Miss Zhi should be the one who is afraid.”

Zhao Zhi replied evilly, “You didn’t seem to be that considerate for others that night? Are you a man or not, get up the horse quickly!”

Xiang Shaolong knows that she was being sarcastic about that night when he jumped up her horse and took advantage of her so he shook his head and said with a wry laugh, “Your mouth is truly formidable. But since you’ve had experienced it before and knows that I am not a gentleman who can keep his hands to himself, with such a warm and soft body, my disobedient hands will enjoy themselves on Miss Zhi’s alluring body!”

Zhao Zhi’s pretty face tightened as her long, pretty eyes stared at him fiercely, “Who cares what you want to do, get up the horse quickly!”

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed, “My god!”. When a woman obviously knows that you have the intention of taking advantage of her, and yet insist on giving you the chance no matter how fierce she looks on the outside, what can this be other than she is secretly in love. This is indeed extremely alluring, and enough to make his head ache terribly.

Now it's as if he is riding on a tiger, unable to advance or retreat. He sighed and said, "It's so late! Can we talk about this tomorrow? I'd better go home and sleep!"

Zhao Zhi was so furious her face turned pale and she whipped her horse forward to block his way. With her hands on her hip, she pouted angrily and said, "I didn't expect you to be such a wishy-washy person. If you don't come up, I'll harass you the whole night so you won't be able to get a good sleep!"

When a woman gets angry, they are the most unreasonable. Xiang Shaolong stopped walking and said with a sigh, "Doesn't Miss already has someone you like? The way you are giving me such a bargain, I'm afraid it's a little... heh! A little 'that thing'!"

Zhao Zhi's delicate body shook on hearing this as her pretty face suddenly turned dark. It took a while before she gritted her teeth and uttered, "I do not belong to anyone. Dong Kuang! Are you coming up or not?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting, it seems that Zhao Zhi has given her heart from 'that Xiang Shaolong' to 'this Xiang Shaolong'. It seems that this time the tables have turned on him. His hands turned up in a helpless pose, he hardened his heart and said, "You asked for it!" Before he finished his words, he has already leapt up the horse behind her back.

Zhao Zhi exclaimed softly and her long legs lightly clasped the horse's belly and the handsome steed started running. Xiang Shaolong's hands went forward and held her narrow belly which does not have an extra ounce of fat, his body at the same time pressed against her back and shoulder. This feeling

of excitement immediately stirred Xiang Shaolong's lust.

However Zhao Zhi looked as if she felt nothing at all, her face still looked icy as she concentrated on riding, turning left and right on the quiet streets of the ancient city, towards an unknown destination.

Xiang Shaolong leaned his head forward and inhaled deeply near her neck, then leaned into her face and said, "Miss's body is so fragrant!"

Zhao Zhi's expression looked wooden but made no show of any unhappiness of rejection. Of course it does not mean she approved or encouraged it, but just pursed her lips, as if she's made up her mind not to talk.

Xiang Shaolong became more outrageous as he moved his lips along her smooth face and said resolutely, "If you don't talk, I am going to take advantage of you."

Zhao Zhi said icily, "Aren't you already doing that?"

Even saints have a temper. Xiang Shaolong's 'temper' rose, as one of his hands rubbed her belly while the other moved up towards her twin peaks, slowly advancing threateningly.

Her muscles are full and supple, giving him much enjoyment.

Zhao Zhi's pretty face started to turn red as her delicate body trembled a little yet she continued to grit her teeth, not making any objections at all.

Xiang Shaolong's lust may be burning but Jing Jun's presence seems to be blocking between them like a ghost. He sighed dejectedly and gave up the grand plan of invading her chest as his hands returned to her belly. He even left her face and sat straight. The bamboo forest appeared in front, it turned out that Zhao Zhi is bringing him to her home.

Zhao Zhi reined her horse silently when she saw the bamboo forest, looking at the dim light that is flickering in her home up ahead as she made fun of him and said, "So Mister Dong is actually a gentleman?"

Xiang Shaolong was exasperated as he pulled her back hard. Zhao Zhi exclaimed softly as she fell into his arms.

In the darkness of the bamboo forest, they can't see each other at all but could smell each other. The excitement of their bodies touching was instead heightened because of this 'darkroom' surrounding. Zhao Zhi leaned her head languidly against his broad chest, so nervous that her lips can't help but pant quickly. Xiang Shaolong only have to shift his head down slightly and he would be able to enjoy her fragrant lips and he is sure that she will not resist at all.

Such a thought is indeed enticing. Xiang Shaolong's reason was swinging dangerously over the side of collapse when he sighed and said, "Aren't you that Xiang Shaolong's little lover? The way you and I... heh..."

Zhao Zhi's reply still sounded cold, "I've not fallen in love with you, so why does it matter?" Xiang Shaolong exclaimed hoarsely, "Miss Zhi seems to be unaware that you are in my arms, yet you can say such words."

Zhao Zhi argued back, "I'm not as strong as you, you forced me into your arms, so what could I do?"

Xiang Shaolong chuckled, "Then why are you stopping your horse here? I didn't force you to do that!"

Zhao Zhi is indeed stubborn as she said nonchalantly, "I'll stop where I want to and do what I want to, it's none of your business."

Xiang Shaolong was so angry that he almost fell off the horse. He extended his hand and moved to caress her rounded thighs as he praised, "Miss Zhi's legs are firm and supple."

Zhao Zhi did not say a word and allowed his molestations. Xiang Shaolong gritted his teeth and thought that since he's made a head start, he might as well continue. He has always been a flirt and with a beauty right in front of him, how can he have the resolution to resist. He was about to move his hands and invade the top and bottom at the same time when the sounds of dogs barking could be heard right ahead, accompanied with the sounds of light footsteps.

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly retracted the hands that was caressing her chest and thighs whereas Zhao Zhi exhaled softly as she sat straight and rode the horse forward.

Both of them did not speak at all, but that soul tearing feeling is still so strong that it can melt any man or woman.

## Chapter 11

### Unable to enjoy

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In Zhao Zhi's elegant little house, Xiang Shaolong leaned on the couch in a relaxed manner while the 2 sisters Shan Rou and Zhao Zhi sat opposite him. The former was staring at him fiercely while the latter still maintained her icy look but her head was lowered in deep thought.

Shan Rou said stiffly, "I asked my sister to invite you here because I hope we can cooperate and deal with Tian Dan!"

Xiang Shaolong already knew he'd meet with this problem so he said, "If you are planning to assassinate him in Handan, forget about getting me to do such a foolish thing with you. Even if you succeed you will not be able to escape."

Shan Rou's pretty face turned icy as she replied, "You're the fool. We've already found out that Tian Dan has arrived at the outskirts of the city at dusk today, but he has yet to enter the city. The person escorting him is the famous general of Qi named Dan Chu, and they have an army of about 10,000. Therefore the only chance to kill him is when he is travelling light with minimal men into the city. The few men near that conniving thief, specially those 2 brothers called Liu Zhongfu and Liu Zhongshi, are not only excellent fighters but can tear lions and tigers apart alive. Look!"

She pulled down her collar to reveal almost half of her ample and fair bosom,



but on it there is a sword scar that can shock anyone who sees it.

Xiang Shaolong did not expect her to be so bold. His eyes feasted on her ample bosom for a long time before he nodded and said, "You're considered lucky to be alive."

Shan Rou readjusted her clothes, her eyes gleaming as she said, "Isn't Tian Dan your great enemy? No one knows more about Tian Dan's affairs other than me. I was once a maid at his residence, so now you understand the benefit of working together with us!"

Xiang Shaolong has no wish to entangle himself with them any further so he sighed, "Actually there's nothing between Tian Dan and me at all, it's just that I did not want to hurt the both of you that night, that's why I followed your story and said that."

Shan Rou and Zhao Zhi were both dumbfounded.

An icy look came over Shan Rou's eyes and just as Xiang Shaolong was secretly exclaiming, she has already swiftly pulled out a dagger and leapt towards him like a tigress, the dagger aiming towards his chest.

Xiang Shaolong is extremely experienced in unarmed combat so with a fake move, not only did he grab the wrist of the hand that was holding the dagger, he also threw her over to the other side of the table and pressed down on her like a tiger.

Shan Rou kept struggling and even tried to bite him.

Xiang Shaolong lifted his head and pressed her arms down firmly, his thighs tightened around her pretty legs and at the same time looked warningly at Zhao Zhi, only to see her looking lost and dumbfounded as she watched her sister cursing and struggling under Xiang Shaolong's body.

Xiang Shaolong put his mind at ease as he started to enjoy the feeling of this body violently running against his, but at the same time he has no idea how to wrap up this horrible situation.

Shan Rou may be a lot stronger than the average woman but how can she fight against Xiang Shaolong, a muscular man of that physique. She struggled a little longer before she toned down, her chest heaving as she stared at Xiang Shaolong with hatred, giving her another air of allure.

Zhao Zhi was still seated at the same place, not moving nor making any noise.

Xiang Shaolong lowered his head to look at this feisty beauty and asked with a smile, "I acted with kind intentions, why is Miss treating me like this?"

Shao Rou cursed, "Liar!"

Xiang Shaolong finally understood that she wanted to kill him in anger because she was lied to, and also disappointed that they no longer have his assistance. From this it can be seen that she actually regards him very highly.

He can clearly hear her heart beating, feel her pulse moving in her energetic body, and smell the faint fragrance from her dainty body. He shook his head and asked with a wry smile, "Still don't want to release the dagger?"

Shan Rou stared at him angrily for a moment before the corners of her mouth curved disdainfully as she relaxed her hand and let the weapon drop.

The tense atmosphere relaxed and Xiang Shaolong immediately felt the strong sense of their bodies so close together. Earlier Zhao Zhi had already ignited his lust so how can he control himself now. Immediately his body reacted in the most primitive way for a man.

Shan Rou was originally staring at him but suddenly she blushed and her lids closed a little, obviously she has fully felt his manhood pressing down.

Xiang Shaolong was extremely embarrassed and he said quietly, "If you promise not to attack me again, I'll release you immediately."

Shan Rou managed to utter her agreement. The look of a stirred beauty, appearing on the face of this strong and feisty woman, lures one to more imagination.

Xiang Shaolong threw her dagger towards the corner of the room first before squatting up slowly. He moved towards the wall and leaned there.

Shan Rou was still lying flat, as if she's lost the ability to get up. Her clothes are now in disarray and split open at the bottom, revealing her snowy white and long thighs.

Xiang Shaolong looked towards Zhao Zhi. This pretty younger sister turned her face away, not looking at him.

Shan Rou jumped up with the agility of a cat and without looking at Xiang Shaolong, uttered a single word through her gritted teeth, "Scram!"

Xiang Shaolong was unaffected and said with a smile, "If Miss Rou chases me away, you will definitely regret it for the rest of your life."

Shan Rou went to sit next to her sister as her eyes stared roundly at him, "Who do you think you are, just looking at a liar like you is enough to irritate anyone."

Xiang Shaolong sighed and asked, "Do the two of you love your parents who have met with such misfortune?"

Shan Rou said angrily, "Isn't that an obvious answer?"

She may be rude but ultimately she was willing to answer the question, so her asking Xiang Shaolong to scram was only said in pique.

Xiang Shaolong tried his best to answer calmly, "To be able to exact revenge but not doing it, can be considered unfilial. But knowing very well that to take revenge is akin to sending yourself to death, causing great grief to departed parents, is also another form of not being filial. Under such circumstances, although living in shame, it's also a way of controlling oneself and repaying your parents."

Shan Rou was slightly shaken as she answered quietly, "We don't need you to reprimand us, go back and enjoy your riches!"

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback, knowing that this woman really has some feelings for him, that's why she was so furious to find out she was lied to and now her words are filled with reproach.

Zhao Zhi looked towards him and said icily, "Now that everything is made clear, us sisters and you have nothing to do with each other. Mister Dong, please go home and enjoy your sleep! Even if we die, it's none of your business."

Her tone of voice was the same as her sister's. A feeling of pity welled up in Xiang Shaolong's heart as he asked gently, "Don't you want to see Shan Lan again?"

Both women trembled suddenly, staring at him incredulously.

Shan Rou exclaimed sharply, "What did you say?"

Xiang Shaolong stood up and went towards this pair of pretty sisters and knelt down on one knee, leaning his head forward to look at the 2 pretty faces and said earnestly, "Please trust me! Shan Lan is now at a very safe place, and has found a good man, waiting for you to meet her."

The icy look on Zhao Zhi's pretty face melted as she uttered, "You're not lying to us again! How could sh have escaped the calamity?"

Xiang Shaolong used Dong Kuang's name and made a vicious vow.

The 2 girls exchanged look then hugged each other tightly, looking both

dejected and overjoyed at the same time.

After the 2 women had settled down a little, Xiang Shaolong said, “I am not one who is bothered about wealth and riches. As for Tian Dan’s matter, because I personally have no enmity with him, it’s difficult for me to plan to kill him, not to mention that it’s a very unwise thing to do. With the situation now, you can kill him but will not be able to escape, and with the chance of success being so slim, why don’t you live well for now and think of another way to deal with him?”

Shan Rou turned her pretty face away to look outside the window. Although she looked as if she’s not listening, but with her character, as long as she’s not saying anything bad, it means that she is already tempted.

Zhao Zhi pleaded with him, “Where is Sister Lan now? How did you meet her. She... she married into your family?”

Xiang Shaolong smiled and said, “Does Miss Zhi want me to lie to you again?”

Zhao Zhi stared at him angrily and pouted, “How I wish I could stab you too!”

Xiang Shaolong grinned, “Why don’t you just punch me!”

Shan Rou turned back again and said with her emotions controlled, “What would make you help us assassinate Tian Dan?” Xiang Shaolong felt his head aching, what he said earlier seemed to be spoken on vain as he slapped his forehead and uttered, “Heavens! So you were not listening to me at all.”

Zhao Zhi asked thru gritted teeth, “If both of us sisters offer ourselves to you at the same time, will you change your mind?”

Shao Rou’s delicate body trembled but she did not say anything, only chewing her lip as she lowered her pretty face, for the first time revealing a look of shyness.

Xiang Shaolong did not expect her to give such an outrageous suggestion and stared speechlessly at Zhao Zhi, who was looking at him unwaveringly. His eyes can’t help but travel past the 2 ladies’ delicate bodies, only to feel his throat go dry. He coughed and said, “Miss Zhi must be joking. It’s not that I do not wish to help, but I have my own reasons which cannot be revealed and I cannot be distracted by other matters.”

Zhao Zhi said gently, “Why not this! If there is really no opportunity, my sister and I will definitely not force you to do on a death mission with us but if there is a chance that we can succeed alive, will you help us fulfill this dream of 7 years? Since we’ve already become your woman, naturally we will not be totally unrelated to you.”

Xiang Shaolong looked at Shan Rou, then looked at Zhao Zhi and was secretly lamenting, worried that if he uses strong words to reject them, he’ll certainly hurt their pride. He sighed and said, “Hai! I am really moved by your sincerity and willingness to sacrifice but I cannot take advantage of others when they are in peril and obtain your precious bodies at this time. Why not this! Look at the situation first before making another plan! Oh, why have I not seen that Uncle Zheng of yours?”

Shan Rou saw that he has changed his mind so her expression warmed

greatly. This Dong Kuang's status is special, smart and an excellent fighter with a lot of men under him. If he helps, there's no need to worry that things will not succeed.

Zhao Zhi replied, "His health is not so good, so other than fishing for news, we have no wish for him to worry himself over other matters."

Xiang Shaolong stretched lazily and yawned, "It's late! I should be going back to sleep too." The 2 ladies stood up together with him.

Suddenly the 3 of them felt awkward over the ambiguous relationship between each of them.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that he'd better escape as soon as possible and exclaimed, "No need to see me off!" and walked towards the door.

The 2 ladies exchanged looks and Zhao Zhi accompanied him to the main door and said, "Will you use my horse?"

Xiang Shaolong remembered her round and firm thighs, her supple breasts and almost wanted to embrace her and have some intimacy with her which he is sure she would not object. However he is not inclined to consider love matters again, and also because of Jing Jun, he forced down this strong urge and said, "No need, it's not too far away."

He walked towards the bamboo forest but Zhao Zhi still followed behind him so he said in puzzlement, "Miss Zhi please go back! No need to send me off."



Zhao Zhi did not say a single word until they went into the darkness of the bamboo forest before she said quietly, “You don’t have to go back.”

Xiang Shaolong’s heart ‘danced’ with joy. By saying that, Zhao Zhi is expressing her wish to offer her precious chastity to him and for a proud person like her, these are difficult words to express.

But he does not have the luck to enjoy this no matter how much he wants to.

He sighed and hardened his heart to reply, “There’s no need for Miss to do this. If you truly like me, there’s nothing more I can ask for but since Miss’s heart is already with another person and it’s not as if you’ve truly fallen for a boorish man like me, then why must you cheapen yourself like this? I’m helping both of you not because I’m expecting rewards!”

Zhao Zhi pounded his back twice hard with her fists and pouted angrily, “I hate you to death!” before turning back and walking away.

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and smiled wryly. He was stoned for a moment before collecting his thoughts and made his way home.

Once he thought of the Sword Meet tomorrow, he became excited again.

The road in front is still foggy but he is confident that he will solve everything.

Although he knows the fate of some of the people in this era, however he has no idea what his own future would be.

No matter what, in this great era of the ancient warring states, life is truly more exciting than what he could have experienced in the 21st century.

End of Book 07